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Competitive Edge Teaching: A Comparison of Differentiated Reading Instruction in the K-3 Elementary Classroom to the Sports Psychology Behind High School Athletic Coaching Methods

Lindsay W. Lee
Gardner-Webb University, llee9@gardner-webb.edu

COMPETITIVE EDGE TEACHING: A COMPARISON OF DIFFERENTIATED
READING INSTRUCTION IN THE K-3 ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TO THE
SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC COACHING
METHODS

By
Lindsay Wilder Lee

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Abstract

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This study explored the similarities between the philosophies and techniques used by select high school athletic coaches and select elementary reading teachers. The study shows parallels between the psychology behind coaching methodology within high school athletics and differentiated instruction within the elementary reading classroom. The purpose of this research was to develop a pathway to influence the increased implementation of differentiated instruction in elementary schools by determining and highlighting these parallels. The design of the study is a triangular analysis of interview questions conducted in a face-to-face interview format, document analysis, and surveys to show the parallels between the planning and implementation approaches. The data gathered from these measures generated patterns and identified strong parallels of structure between instructional delivery in the two areas. We learned that with a better focus on aligning prioritization within these parallels, school leaders have the opportunity to shed new light on differentiated instruction, grounded in the UDL model, to better promote and foster student success in the classrooms. Perception is reality, and it is the goal that this study provides a positive perception of differentiated instruction.

Keywords: differentiated instruction, differentiated strategies in the K-3 reading classroom, teaching like a coach, benefits to small group instruction, differentiated instruction from a coaching perspective, sports psychology in coaching

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Academically high-performing schools are not always the home of championship athletic teams. Counter wise, it is not uncommon to find a championship athletic program within a low-performing school. Educators often question what coaches do to develop athletes who are motivated to give 100% when many of those same students may fail to achieve grade-level proficiency in the classroom. Coaches and players practice all week. Friday night lights penetrate the night sky, and scoreboards tell the truth. In education, teachers impart knowledge for at least 9 months of the year. The end-of-year summative tests reveal the truth. For educators, the results are often less than stellar. One focus site reviewed in this study achieved a record of nine of 11 games won (or 82%) in the 2018 season, yet only 33% of the 2018-2019 senior class completed ninth grade on grade level. Research has indicated that students reading under proficiency level by the end of third grade will likely stay behind. According to the 2010 study of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

This study explores the similarities between the techniques used by select high school coaches and select K-3 elementary reading teachers. The study shows parallels between the high school athletic coaching world and the teaching world of K-3 elementary reading by illuminating the psychology behind and strategies and techniques master coaches use that may play out well in the elementary classroom. In education, just as in the world of athletics, the ultimate goal is to foster an environment that produces student achievement at the highest possible level. It is the ultimate goal of teachers to scaffold students to reach their highest levels of achievement.

Effective coaches analyze video coverage and data from the prior week's games of both their own team and their upcoming opponent's team. They plan strategically to ensure that their team is up to the challenge for the week ahead. They determine changes that must be made and areas where they need to scaffold player development so they will be prepared for the upcoming challenges. Coaches collaborate to seek support from community leaders, teachers, and parents to ensure all necessary resources are available. Lombardi (2019) said that the achievements of an organization result from the combined effort of all individuals. Do teachers do the same as coaches? Do teachers analyze student performance from the previous weeks? Do teachers strategically plan to ensure students are prepared for the challenges ahead? Do teachers determine changes that are necessary to scaffold student understanding and development so they will be prepared for what will come next? Do teachers seek out collaborative support from colleagues, community leaders, and parents when necessary? The two worlds are more closely imaged than most would assume. Some teachers do all of these things too. When a teacher knows their students, their needs, their stories, and their historical data and makes the necessary changes and adjustments throughout the year, growth happens. Proficiency may not always be achieved, but growth can happen. It is not an easy task, and teachers may often feel like they are juggling too much in too many directions like the Harlem Globe Trotters; however, hard work performed according to the individual needs of the students produces champions in the classroom, just as it does in athletics.

Effective coaches are cognizant that some players need one-on-one coaching. Often a team has specialized coaches for these specific needs. In education, differentiated instruction is a philosophical model for teachers to customize each student's learning path

that facilitates learning in the way that works best for each student. To do this successfully, teachers must understand that with differentiated instruction, the learning goals are the same, but the path and the methods used differ in achieving those goals. Differentiation in classroom practices recognizes the notion that children differ, and the most effective teachers do whatever it takes to engage the whole range of students in learning at all levels (Tomlinson, 2001).

Many teachers still teach using a whole-group instructional approach, despite all the research supporting the philosophy of differentiated learning. Allan and Tomlinson (2000) stated that many students will be assigned to teachers engulfed in a system designed to treat all students as if they are the same. From data analysis and scaffolding skills to making community connections and facilitating collaborative efforts, the similarities to coaching a championship team are undeniable. Tomlinson (2000) suggested that great coaches do not achieve greatness for individual gain or that of the team by making all players the same. So why do some teachers attempt to make all students alike?

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) identified the following misconceptions about differentiated instruction. The first misconception is that differentiation is a set of strategies to be implemented when it is in fact a philosophy. Differentiated instruction is a mindset about teaching and learning. It is a set of principles, not strategies. Consequently, it is misconceived that a district or school leader can show teachers how to do this effectively. In reality, learning this philosophical way of teaching requires educators to rethink their classroom practices from the results of ongoing processes, reflections, and adjustments in their individual classrooms. Differentiation is not

something a teacher does or does not do; rather, it is the way a teacher proactively plans instruction to always address student differences in readiness, interest, and learning style. Differentiation is not just about the instruction itself but about the delivery. When effectively implemented, differentiated instruction is interconnected with and inseparable from a positive learning environment, high-quality curriculum, data-driven decision-making, and flexible classroom management and grouping for instructional delivery. All elements must work together strongly, or the entire structure becomes weak and ineffective (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). A skilled athletic coach employs key concepts from Tomlinson and Imbeau's theory. These concepts include reflection, adjustments, proactive planning, and accommodating various learning styles.

Additionally, there should be no confusion or misconception that differentiated instruction is the same as modifica20tions and accommodations necessary in the support of special education and exceptional needs of students. Differentiated instruction is a mindset for all; and though it incorporates the needs of special education and exceptional children, it is a mindset to meet all students where they are. It is not just for students with Individual Learning Plans/Programs (IEPs). The intent of this dissertation is not to confuse the two but to explain how the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction supports all students and all needs (both identified and not identified).

The term exceptional when used to describe students refers to those students who have exceptional learning styles, talents, and/or behaviors that fall outside of the normal developmental range for learning and require specialized planning for learning (Columbia College, 2020). Students who qualify for and require special education are students who need specialized services and instruction due to learning disabilities and/or medical issues

impacting normal development (Columbia College, 2020). Students who fall under these realms are often identified as exceptional learners, and their instructional plans are managed under the exceptional children's department within school districts. The Council for Exceptional Children (2020) defined disability terms and definitions as taken from the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act. Autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairments including blindness, developmental delay, infant or toddler with a disability, at-risk infant or toddler, gifted and talented, and twice exceptional are all defined in accordance with the Council for Exceptional Children in the Definition of Terms section of this chapter.

Again, differentiated instruction is a philosophical approach that supports the needs of all students and is not specific to or limited to students who are identified in one or more of these categories and require specialized plans and services.

Masten (2017) wrote about the following key elements of differentiated instruction released by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Masten said differentiation can be described as implementing classroom practice with a balanced emphasis on individual students and course content understanding. Masten explained that students differ in a host of ways that profoundly affect how they learn and the methods they will need at different points to scaffold and support their learning. Masten also explained that the differences among students include, for example, differences in background experience, culture, language, gender, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning, support systems for learning,

self-awareness as a learner, confidence as a learner, and independence as a learner. Masten indicated that teachers must continuously adjust plans to connect individual learners to the key concepts and teachers have the responsibility to ensure all students master the content of each key concept. Teachers must understand each of their students, the content, and how the nature of both can connect. Teachers must understand what the needs are to make this connection happen. Masten explained that within classroom practice, the core elements of the curriculum (content, process, product, and effect) must connect with the three categories of student needs (readiness, interest, and learning).

Central Question

What are common strategies between differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology?

Subquestions

1. How do elementary reading teachers define/articulate differentiated instruction?

2. How do athletic coaches define/articulate effective (differentiated) coaching?

3. What are the similarities in the strategies used by elementary teachers and athletic coaches when preparing for the next grade level or the next opponent?

4. How do elementary reading teachers describe the role of motivation?

5. How do athletic coaches describe the role of motivation?

This study explored the similarities of strategy and technique among athletic coaches and elementary reading teachers. Neither athletic coaches nor elementary reading teachers can recruit students who have already developed the needed skill sets. They must work with the talent they have by scaffolding skill development. Both coaches and

teachers must prepare for upcoming challenges. Differentiating instruction to accommodate the different ways students learn requires and involves a large amount of common sense and support from educational theory and research (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). Tomlinson (2014) explained that in differentiated classrooms, teachers begin where students are, not at the front of a curriculum guide as it is written. Many would argue that the same is true for coaches.

Problem Statement

Could a comparison of the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction to successful athletic coaching help to better influence teachers in honestly answering whether we are serving *all* students so they can maximize their growth toward reading proficiency? In elementary reading education, just as in secondary athletics, teachers must work with the students they have without the option to recruit those with the necessary skill sets to succeed. A site chosen for review in this study recorded a record of nine of 11 games won (9–2) in the 2018 football season, yet only 33% of the 2018-2019 senior class completed ninth grade on grade level in reading. Research has shown that readers lacking proficiency by the end of third grade will likely stay behind. According to the 2010 study of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2019b) reported that in the North Carolina third- through fifth-grade reading EOG scores, only 57.5% showed proficiency. In a specific district reviewed, only 41.5% performed at a proficient level in 2017. Most disturbing, though, was that this number is far less than 50% (50%

performance rarely wins a championship). Ten of 13 schools in District X received a green check for meeting growth goals in reading. A green check is a visual symbol used in the data records that indicates the goal was met. It could be argued that growth is the most important measure in data analysis. Tomlinson (2001) argued that in measuring achievement with grades, it is most important to reflect teaching and learning that respect individual student differences and reflect individual growth. It could also be argued that the amount of growth and the pace of growth tell the important story of where we are in closing achievement gaps and increasing proficiency levels. Though growth is crucially important in closing performance gaps and reaching proficiency levels, should a district have so many green checks when proficiency is so low? It is definitely possible, but it raises questions. If this is the best proficiency a district can obtain and still have so many green checks, is something wrong? Or are the criteria to obtain a green check too low? These are questions that could drive further research; but for now, in this study, the focus is on whether instructional delivery is serving *all* students with the best possible instructional models. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) referenced John Stroup, a University of Virginia doctoral student, in their book *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom*, including Stroup's explanation of the misconstrued notion of equal access to education. Stroup (2009, as cited in Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) argued that people have often misconstrued equal access to education to mean that the education system is one size fits all, a system that teaches all students the same things at the same pace with the same resources and instructional delivery. Stroup then clarified that differentiated instruction recognizes the differences in students and that equal access to education means all students are provided the resources, instruction, and support they need to meet

the set goals and objectives even if they go about it differently from their peers. Is this what coaches do?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to develop a pathway to influence the implementation of differentiated instruction in elementary schools by developing an observable parallel between the systemic approaches of athletic coaches and those of successful classroom teachers in hopes of revealing evidence to support the success of this strategic instructional approach. This pathway will focus on changing the way teachers think of an instructional delivery style that uses differentiated instruction as the instructional planning and delivery method. A complete comparison has been done to uncover how differentiated instruction aligns with the efforts of athletic coaches in their data-driven planning and implementation styles. It was the goal of this study to prove that differentiated instruction can produce champions in the classroom just as it does on the game field. Dweck (2016) stated the following:

> If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself, then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's unflattering. What's more, if you're oriented toward learning, as they are, you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. (p. 6)

With this theory in mind, this study may influence the mindset of educators in accepting and embracing an understanding of the current abilities of students related to learning the curriculum and will push teachers to adopt effective measures and strategies in implementing and delivering successful instruction that supports effective learning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this qualitative study on the differentiated instructional philosophy is grounded in the beliefs of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL focuses on the "why," "what," and "how" of learning (CAST, 2020). An analysis of perception, understanding, and attitudes measured through interviews, surveys, and document analysis was conducted within this overall comparative study.

The Iris Center (2019) defined differentiated instruction as a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities by looking at readiness, interest, and learning profiles within the three aspects of instruction: content, process, and product. The intent is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting the needs of each student, instead of expecting students to change themselves to fit the curriculum (Hall, 2002).

Though many experts and practitioners have recognized that the research on differentiated instruction is limited (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Anderson, 2007; Hall, 2002), there is solid research on specific practices that provide support for differentiation. Huebner (2010) discussed this and defined such specific practices as including the use of effective classroom management, promotion of student engagement and motivation, assessment of student readiness, response to learning styles, grouping of students for instruction, and teaching to the students' zone of proximal development (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Ellis & Worthington, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development as the distance between what a learner can demonstrate without assistance and what a learner can do with assistance. Tomlinson and Strickland (2005) stated that teachers understand this zone of proximal development by

adjusting one or more of the three components of instruction. They adjust the content, which is what the student learns; the process, which is how the student learns; and/or the product, which is how the student applies the knowledge to show mastery of the information. Based on this research, Huebner (2010) explained that no one-size-fits-all model exists for differentiated instruction and it differs based on student prior knowledge, interests, and abilities in a given classroom.

Experts (Anderson, 2007; Rock et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2000) suggested a focus on the essential ideas and skills of the content, a response to individual student differences (learning styles, prior knowledge, interests, and levels of engagement), the flexible grouping of students based on the differences, an integration of ongoing relevant assessments with the instruction, and continuous assessment to guide instruction and meet the needs of the students.

Tomlinson's (1999b) examination of the implementation of differentiated instruction at both the school and district levels led to her recommendations. Tomlinson (1999b) argued that for successful implementation, leadership must have a solid understanding of the concept to fully and coherently present to teachers and school leadership. This implementation should then be nurtured with different teaching models to encourage teachers to apply the concept with flexibility, creativity, and choice while providing high-quality professional development and time for collaboration, planning, and implementation (Tomlinson, 1999b).

UDL presents ways of thinking about teaching and learning with a mindset and understanding that give all students equal access to success (Morin, 2020). UDL operates with all the information it offers with the overall goal being to utilize a variety of

teaching methods in a flexible approach that provides all students the opportunity to succeed (Morin, 2020). It offers a multitude of suggestions and resources to meet the needs of all students with the three main principles being representation, action and expression, and engagement (Morin, 2020).

Overview of Methodology

The general approach to carrying out this study was to conduct interviews, surveys, and document analysis to explore the parallels between the planning styles of athletic coaches and elementary classroom reading teachers utilizing differentiated instructional approaches. The design of the study was an analysis of information collected by conducting face-to-face (or virtual) interviews, surveys, and document analysis of plans to show the parallels between the two planning and implementation approaches. The research plan included conducting an interview, collecting written surveys, and doing a document analysis of randomly selected plans of the successful athletic coaches and successful K–3 classroom teachers regarding their planning and implementation styles. This information was compared to differentiated instructional methods to determine parallels.

Coaches participating in this study were deemed successful if they had a winning record within a minimum of the past 4 of 5 years or in the final 4 of 5 years of their careers. This means that for the past 5 years or their final 5 years of coaching, their programs recorded more wins than losses in 4 of the 5 years. Teachers in this study were deemed successful if their administrators recognized them as strong, effective teachers who had proven records of producing student growth. It was suggested that administrators use data such as, but not limited to, Education Value-Added Assessment

System (EVAAS) scores in the past 4 of 5 years. EVAAS primarily focuses on growth measures for individual students assigned to individual teachers, so the scores will not necessarily equate to the overall proficiency levels; however, for this study, teachers who were successfully producing significant growth among their students were fit for participation. EVAAS is a tool North Carolina uses to measure the impact of teachers, schools, and districts on learning (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019a).

Interview questions were asked by me of both differentiated instructional elementary reading teachers and high school athletic coaches. These questions are listed below and were presented to both groups in an interview format.

1. How do you analyze weekly performance data?

2. What do you look for in this analysis?

3. How do the findings from this data analysis assist and/or influence your plans for the upcoming week?

4. What are the differences in the way you teach/coach all students/players?

5. How do you differentiate the way you teach/coach all students/players?

6. What steps would you recommend as important pathways to differentiated instruction/coaching?

7. How do you define effective planning for effective differentiated teaching/ coaching?

8. How do you overcome student/player limitations?

9. How does motivation factor into your approach/plans?

10. Do you implement motivation activities? Explain.

The above interview questions were asked by me of four athletic coaches with successful records over the past 5 years and four elementary reading teachers who have demonstrated great growth and proficiency success over the past 5 years according to their administrator. These individuals were interviewed with the above questions, and responses were recorded via audio recording and later transcribed for further analysis. After several reads of the raw data, they were coded according to emerging themes. The themes served to answer the research questions. Additionally, these participants were surveyed and plan documents were analyzed to provide a triangular collection of data. This triangular collection of data aimed to better determine the emerging themes with multiple checkpoints.

After the themes emerged, they were reviewed and compared for similarities. This study posed no risk in that no minors were participating in the research. Additionally, the identities of the interviewees were kept confidential. At no point were deceptive tactics used, and no incentives were offered to the participants.

Individuals had a right not to participate in this study. In the event a participant dropped out, another was selected for that category. Participant names, school names, and program names were not and will not be disclosed. Chapter 4 presents the results of this research, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusion.

Definition of Terms

A list of defined terms is included below for the clarity of this study.

Accommodations

The changes in how a student learns material (Understood for All, Inc., 2020).

Assessment

A test or analysis of something (Your Dictionary, n.d.a).

At-Risk Infant or Toddler

An individual under the age of 3 years who would be at risk of experiencing a substantial developmental delay if early intervention services were not provided to the individual (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Autism

The developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions, generally evident before age 3, adversely affects a child's educational performance, and includes other characteristics such as repetitive activities, movements, resistance to environmental change or change in schedule/routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Data-Driven

The process by which educators examine assessment data to identify student strengths and deficiencies and apply those findings to their practice (Mertler, 2014).

Deaf-Blindness

Associated hearing and visual impairments where the combination causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs that are designed solely for children with deafness or children with blindness (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Deafness

Hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely

affects a child's educational performance (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Developmental Delay

A child aged 3-9 years (or any subset of that range), and may, at the discretion of the state and the local educational agency, include a child experiencing developmental delays, as defined by the state and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication development; social or emotional development; or adaptive development; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Differentiated Instruction (Differentiation)

A process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where they are, rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum (Hall, 2002). It is also defined as a teacher's reacting responsively to a learner's needs (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000).

Emotional Disturbance

A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a level of degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- The inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- The inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

- Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings during normal circumstances.

- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

- A tendency to develop physical symptoms of fears associated with personal or school problems.

Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia, but the term does not apply to socially maladjusted children unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Exceptional Needs (Special Needs)

The disabilities that are taken from and fall under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Flexible Grouping

Occurs when a teacher plans student working arrangements that vary widely and purposefully so students work in similar readiness groups with peers having the same or similar academic needs, interests, or learning styles while also leaving an element of choice for the students at times (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000).

Gifted and Talented

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Hearing Impairment

An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but is not included under the definition of

deafness in this section (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Infant or Toddler with Disability

An individual under 3 years of age who needs early intervention services because the individual is experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in one or more of the areas of cognitive development, physical development, communication development, social or emotional development, and adaptive development; or has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delays (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Intellectual Disability

Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Learning Style/Profile

How a learner prefers to learn or demonstrate mastery of learning. It is the preference for learning, rather than the ability to learn (Sternberg, 1994).

Modifications

Changes in what a student is taught or expected to learn (Understood for All, Inc., 2020).

Motivation

The act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something, the act or process of motivating someone, the condition of being eager to act or work, the condition

of being motivated, and a force or influence that causes someone to do something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Multiple Disabilities

Concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness or mental retardation-orthopedic impairment), a combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments, excluding deaf-blindness (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Orthopedic Impairment

A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's education performance. This includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly impairments caused by diseases such as poliomyelitis or bone tuberculosis, and impairments from other causes such as cerebral palsy, amputations, fractures, or burns (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Other Health Impaired

Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness (or heightened alertness) with respect to the educational environment that is attributed to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome that adversely affect a child's educational performance (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Planning

The act of formulating a course of action or of drawing up plans (Your

Dictionary, n.d.b).

Prior Knowledge

Knowledge that stems from previous experience (Your Dictionary, n.d.c).

Proficiency

Appropriate advancement in an art, occupation, or branch of knowledge (Merriam-Webster, n.d.d).

Readiness Level

The level at which a learner is receptive to learning because it is attainable, meaning it is neither too easy nor too difficult (Tomlinson, 1999a). It is a learner's skill level as it relates to understanding a task (Tomlinson, 2001).

Recruiting

Finding and attracting employees, new members, students, athletes, etc. (Dictionary.com, 2019).

Scaffolding

Providing support with a framework or platform (Your Dictionary, n.d.d).

Specific Learning Disability

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia but does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage

(Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Speech or Language Impairment

A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Traumatic Brain Injury

An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairment in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Twice Exceptional

A gifted and talented student with a co-occurring disability (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Visual Impairments (and Blindness)

An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020).

Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations for this study include somewhat of a personal bias in that I am a teacher who believes in and intertwines the differentiated instructional philosophy in my practices at the elementary level, and I am married to a high school football coach. To eliminate this bias as much as possible, I was not a participating teacher, nor was my husband a participating athletic coach; however, the influences of our work, though minimized in the research itself, could not be eliminated completely.

Another limitation may be that some of the quotes from well-known and successful coaches were taken from college- and professional-level coaches. This is only because these are the coaches who have the most books and quotes published and released. They are more publicized figures. They do apply to this work, although from a slightly different angle. Quotes were selected that cross all levels of coaching to eliminate this limitation as much as possible. The main reason this study focused on school-age athletic coaches is that they are not allowed to recruit players as college- and professional-level coaches do. Like classroom teachers, they have to work with and teach those who are assigned to them, which ultimately demonstrates pure scaffolding and teaching ability. Additionally, the interviewees may not represent all perspectives throughout the state among coaches and classroom teachers.

Assumptions include the idea that differentiated instruction is a common practice. Because we know so much about the benefits of differentiated instruction and because packaged instructional programs now embed the concept in their programs, it is assumed that differentiated instruction is a common practice among classroom teachers. But are teachers really implementing the concept as it theoretically is designed? Can it actually

be spelled out within a curriculum guide? Allan and Tomlinson (2000) indicated that the idea of differentiating instruction to accommodate the different ways students learn involves a large amount of common sense coupled with the support of the theory and educational research. It is an approach to teaching that advocates active planning for student differences in classrooms (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). This cannot simply be packaged.

Assumptions also include the misconceptions of differentiated instruction being the same as modification and/or accommodations. Though these two words sound similar and are used in similar contexts, they have different meanings. Accommodation is when there are changes in how a student learns the material, where modification is when the changes are made in what the student is taught or expected to learn (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). They do not equate to differentiated instruction. They are instead vital implementation components of differentiated instruction. The three terms are very different and cannot be used interchangeably.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 of this work includes a complete introduction to the focus topic of the research, including the conceptual framework, a statement of the problem, the central question and subquestions, the purpose of the study, an overview of the methodology, definitions of key terms, and the limitations and assumptions that may have factored into the work. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the chapters.

Chapter 2 includes a complete review of the identified literature that is relevant to this study. This literature is divided into and presented in two main categories. These categories are the psychology and strategies behind successful athletic coaching and

differentiated instruction in the elementary reading classroom. This chapter concludes

with a synthesis of the literature that defines planning and implementation from both the

educational and coaching perspectives.

Chapter 3 includes a complete description of the methodology used for this study

by breaking down the research design plan. The sections within this chapter address the

design of the study, the role of the researcher, the pilot group, data collection, data

analysis, and the methods employed for verification of the findings.

Chapter 4 includes the approved research with full detail of the raw data. Included

are the interview questions with transcribed responses from the interviews, surveys with

survey responses, and observation notes and data all broken down by research question

by research groups.

Chapter 5 includes the conclusion of the findings based on the raw data of the

research and the conducted comparison. The findings are shared in this chapter, along

with the future direction of the work and possible implications for future research that

this work could generate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

      This literature review explored research in two key sections. Those sections were differentiated instruction and the sports psychology behind effective athletic coaching methods at the high school level. Within these sections, the topics were defined with implementation approaches, model examples, and available training approaches.

      Could a comparison of the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction to the sports psychology behind successful high school athletic coaching help to better influence us in honestly answering whether or not we are serving ALL students in order for each child to maximize their growth towards reading proficiency? In education, just as in high school athletics, teachers and coaches must work with the students and players they have without the option to recruit those with the necessary skill sets to succeed. A site chosen for this study recorded a record of 9-2 (nine of 11 games won) in the 2018 season, yet only 33% of the 2018-2019 senior class completed ninth grade on grade level in reading. Research supports that reading not developed to proficiency by the third grade will likely stay behind. According to the 2010 study of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

      The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that of the North Carolina third- through fifth-grade reading EOG scores, only 57.5% showed proficiency. In a specific district under review, only 41.5% performed at a proficient level in 2017. Most disturbing though was that this number is far less than 50% (50% performance rarely wins a championship). Ten of 13 schools in District X received a green check for

meeting growth in reading. It could be argued that growth is the most important measure in data analysis. Tomlinson (2001) supported that in measuring achievement with grades, it is most important to reflect teaching and learning that respect individual student differences and reflect individual growth. It could also be argued that the amount of growth and the pace of growth tell the important story of where we are in increasing proficiency levels. Though growth is crucially important in closing performance gaps and reaching proficiency levels, should a district have so many green checks and a proficiency that low? It is definitely possible, but it raises questions. If this is the best proficiency a district can obtain and still have so many green checks, is something wrong? Are the criteria to obtain a green check too low? These are questions that could drive further research; but for now, in this study, the focus is on whether or not instructional delivery is serving ALL students with the best possible instructional models. A prominent belief of many teachers is that whole group instruction is most beneficial and that differentiated instruction is too time-consuming and/or impossible. Often, teachers simply have not been trained on just how to implement differentiated instruction in the classroom. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) referenced John Stroup, a University of Virginia doctoral student, in their book *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom,* including his explanation of the misconstrued notion of equal access to education. Stroup (2009, as cited in Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) argued that people have often misconstrued equal access to education to mean that the education system is one size fits all, a system that teaches all students the same things at the same pace with the same resources and instructional delivery. Stroup then clarified that differentiated instruction recognizes the differences in students and that equal access to education

means each student is provided the resources, instruction, and support they need to meet the set goals and objectives even if going about it differently from their peers. Is this not what coaches do?

The purpose of this research was to develop a pathway to influence the implementation of differentiated instruction in elementary schools by developing an observable parallel between the systemic approaches of successful athletic coaches and those of successful classroom teachers in hopes of developing evidence to support the success of this strategic instructional approach. This pathway focused on changing the way teachers think of the instructional delivery style that uses data-driven differentiated instruction as the instructional planning and delivery method that can drive a teacher's plan book, much like data drive a coach's playbook. A complete comparison was done as to how data-driven differentiated instruction aligns with the efforts of athletic coaches in their data-driven planning and implementation styles. I hoped to prove that data-driven differentiated instruction can produce champions in the classroom just as it does on the ball fields. Dweck (2016) believed,

> If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself, then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's unflattering. What's more, if you're oriented toward learning, as they are, you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. (p. 6)

With this theory in mind, this study may influence the mindset of educators in accepting and embracing that understanding the current abilities of students as it relates to learning the curriculum will push teachers to effective measures and strategies in implementing

and delivering successful instruction that supports effective learning.

First, this literature review demonstrates an in-depth understanding of differentiated instruction, an instructional delivery concept. Literature was reviewed that supports the benefits of a differentiated approach to instructional delivery in an effort to reach all students to promote academic growth. The literature on this topic was then linked to reading instruction at the elementary level. Examples of effective differentiated instruction in reading at the elementary level were also covered in this literature review. The topics included how differentiated instruction is defined, what it actually looks like, what models have proven successful, and how it is learned.

Second, this literature review explored an in-depth look at the sports psychology behind successful athletic coaching methods at the high school level to provide a parallel comparison of what proves to be a successful plan. Explored literature defined what successful coaching is, what it looks like, and how it is obtained, and coaches who have proven these methods.

Finally, there was literature reviewed that explored the role motivation plays in both teaching and coaching. Merriam-Webster (n.d.b) defined motivation as the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something, the act or process of motivating someone, the condition of being eager to act or work, the condition of being motivated, and a force or influence that causes someone to do something. Souders (2021) said motivation reflects something unique about each one of us and allows us to gain valued outcomes like improved performance, enhanced well-being, personal growth, or a sense of purpose. Souders also said motivation is a pathway to change our way of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

This review concludes with the grounded connection to the philosophy of UDL. UDL presents ways of thinking about teaching and learning with a mindset and understanding that give all students equal access to success (Morin, 2020). UDL operates with all of the information it offers with the overall goal being to utilize a variety of teaching methods in a flexible approach that provides all students the opportunity to succeed (Morin, 2020). It offers a multitude of suggestions and resources to meet the needs of all students with the three main principles being representation, action and expression, and engagement (Morin, 2020).

This literature search was conducted through the use of Google, Google Scholar, and Proquest. The literature review included a comprehensive collection of dissertations, theses, articles, books, and other publications. The search descriptors used to identify related articles and texts included but were not limited to differentiated instruction, differentiation, differentiated instruction in the classroom, differentiated strategies, modification and accommodations, perceptions of differentiated instruction, athletic coaching strategies, athletic planning, successful athletic coaching, coaching philosophies, coaching models, and motivation.

The information obtained through this literature review in conjunction with the research provided a comparison of the planning and implementation practices of teachers in the classroom and athletic coaches, identifying the parallels in an effort to change any negative perceptions of differentiated instruction to one that promotes champions in the classroom just as it does on the athletic fields and courts.

Sports Psychology

Hanson (2021) defined sports psychology as the understanding of how the mind

influences an athlete's performance in their chosen sport. American Psychological Association (APA, 2021) defined sports psychology as the use of psychological knowledge and skills to address optimal performance and the well-being of athletes, the developmental and social aspects of sports participation, and the systematic issues associated with sports settings and organizations. APA described that the specialized knowledge of sports psychology includes theory and research of social, historical, cultural, and developmental foundations along with techniques of assessment and skill training, counseling, organizational and systemic aspects, developmental and social issues, biobehavioral bases, and specific knowledge of training science and technical requirements of sport and competition. APA went on to explain some of the principles behind the many strategies and procedures used to address problems faced by athletes as cognitive and behavioral skill training, counseling, and consultation and training.

Blackbyrn (2021) defined coaching as a collaborative, solution-focused, result-oriented systematic process. Benefits of coaching are heightened self-awareness, self-acceptance, well-being, improved goal-setting and attainment, increased self-discovery and self-confidence, better communication and problem-solving skills, broader perspectives, and enhanced quality of life (Blackbyrn, 2021).

Smith and Kays (2010) explained that a coach can run drills day and night, but if they ignore an athlete's mind, they will only tap into a fraction of what the athlete can accomplish. Smith and Kays suggested the implementation of sports psychology practices, use of mental imagery, building a "we" versus "me" mentality, motivational practices, and working well with parents will help athletes reach their goals. Morley and Bailey (2006) presented the differentiation model explaining that it allows a coach to

ensure that sessions are set out and planned correctly. Latz et al. (2009) explained that in order for all students to maximize their gains, it is necessary to have differentiation in place. Matthews (2021) noted that differentiation must not only be used for the slower progressing students/participants but also those progressing quickly with a higher level of talent.

Effective Coaching: High School Athletics

Trusson (2010) identified 10 characteristics of an effective coach: good role model, admirable appearance, punctual, a good teacher, friendly, a good listener, a good communicator, an understanding of development, a team motivator, and being goal-centered. Trusson said that one who portrays these characteristics is a player's coach and is sure to be a favorite. Stuart (2013) described how difficult it is to categorize the top qualities of a coach because top coaches come from different backgrounds and have different styles, but there are qualities they all possess. Stuart went on to list a few key qualities that define a great coach. Stuart first identified leadership as a key quality in that through good leadership, a good leader can unify a group of players and make them committed to a single purpose by guiding, inspiring, and empowering athletes and teams to achieve full potential. Stuart then identified knowledge as the next key quality, explaining that a coach should have an in-depth knowledge of the sport, not necessarily from personal experience, but a clear understanding of the fundamental skills to advance the tactics and strategies involved in the game. Stuart identified motivation as a quality of inspiring and conveying a passion to their players and driving them to get the most out of their own performance. Stuart went on to explain the quality of knowing the athlete and understanding the importance of being aware of the individual differences of the athletes

by paying attention to the players' emotions, strengths, and weaknesses while having empathy in a way that demonstrates deep care about the athletes. Stuart next identified consistency as a key characteristic, saying if a coach wants to change a player's attitude, alter game plans, or improve an athlete's skills, the coach needs to have a consistent message so the players hear the same message clearly and consistently. In addition, Stuart identified effective communication skills as a necessary factor in great coaching, stating that to be an effective coach one must be able to define goals, express these goals and ideas clearly, give direct feedback, reinforce key messages, acknowledge success, and be a compassionate listener who welcomes player questions and feedback. Stuart said an effective coach is effective at game data analysis as well as being able to analyze a game while it is unfolding live, in order to communicate effectively to their team to adjust as needed. This skill includes having the ability to stay composed while making rational decisions quickly. Stuart also included the importance of analyzing statistics, noting that a good coach not only needs to be able to interpret statistics but also to prioritize statistics relevant to the game plan, the opposition, the weather, and other factors. Stuart finally identified the term automaticity to describe the skills and techniques that become second nature to athletes. A good coach recognizes this in their players' skill sets. Automaticity is what every coach wants their athletes to have and is achieved through a well-planned training regime. Jonsson (2006) wrote about the American high school football legend from Summerville, SC, John McKissick, who is the winningest football coach of all time. McKissick's "laws" are order, detail, forgiveness, and teamwork (Jonsson, 2006). Jonsson quoted the school principal commenting on McKissick's trademark style, saying, "He has them run through almost every possible scenario, so they know what they're

doing when it's happening. There's rarely any scrambling around" (para. 22). Hartsell (2018) wrote that after 63 years of coaching, 621 wins, and 10 state championships, McKissick would be recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award at The Post and Courier's CHARLEYS awards. After retiring in 2015, he is the winningest football coach in America. Holcolm (2014) wrote about the retirement of Georgia's Lincoln County coach, Larry Campbell, whose state record of 477 wins gave him the third all-time national ranking. Campbell won 11 state championships and 33 region titles at a rural school that dominated one of Georgia's smallest classifications for decades. "I'd say adapting to the talent we had was the best thing we did" (Campbell, 2014, as cited in Holcolm, 2014, para. 10).

Goricki (2018) wrote about Al Fracassa who coached Birmingham Brother Rice and accumulated 430 wins and three consecutive Division 2 state championships. Fracassa's record gave him an overall 10th place ranking among the top high school football coaches of all time.

> The best football player on your team is important and the last guy on your football team is also important and I learned that when I was at Michigan State. I wasn't an All-American or a first stringer, but I worked really hard to prepare our team as a scouting team quarterback and they made me feel like I was one of the most important players on our football team, and I felt that I was because the coaches made me feel that way. We had a 28-game winning streak, were national champions in the early 50s and I learned so much. I learned to be the best that I could be because my coaches taught me that and I carried that on. (Fracassa, 2018, as cited in Goricki, 2018, para. 11)

Coaching Models

Hanson (2016) is a 4-time Olympian who described several models for team development. These models are the DISC (Dominant, Inspiring, Cautious, Supportive) model, an emotional intelligence model, a learning styles model, and the Stages of Team Development model. The DISC model focuses on behavioral profiles recognizing that personality is relatively fixed, but behavior is flexible. The emotional intelligence model focuses on the key to emotional intelligence being able to control your emotions and create peak performances on demand. The learning styles model suggests there are four stages in learning: activist, reflector, theorist, and pragmatist. This model suggests that while an individual prefers a specific learning style, one does not learn in just one way. An individual learns in a combination of learning styles. Finally, Hanson (2016) described Tuckerman's Stages of Team Development. This model describes and defines the five stages a team goes through in development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Forming takes place when a team is first developed and meets for the first time. Storming is when team members compete with each other for status and acceptance of ideas. Norming is then when the team begins to function more effectively as a team and is no longer focused on individual goals but is working together for team goals. Performing is the stage where the team is functioning at a very high level. Adjourning is the stage that comes with the end of the season.

The University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences (2020) defined three coaching styles that are based on the 1930s leadership studies of Kurt Lewin, a German-American social psychologist: autocratic coaching, democratic coaching, and holistic coaching. Autocratic coaching is an approach where the coach

determines and articulates a vision of what needs to be accomplished and how it will be accomplished with a win-focused, inflexible structure. This approach is more suited for team sports versus individual sports. Democratic coaching is a coach-facilitated, decision-making, and goal-setting approach that takes input from the athletes. This style of coaching gives a lot of autonomy to the players and teams as active collaborators. Holistic coaching is a style where very little is offered in structure or feedback, as the focus is more on creating an environment where players will explore and pursue their own skill development on their own time. This style is best suited for mature players, and the coach's role is more focused on relationship building and as a hands-off facilitator of the environment. The University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences explained that for most coaches, they cannot choose just one of these styles, as very few will fall purely into only one style. The University of Kansas' School of Education and Human Sciences concluded that good coaching lies in the enthusiasm for the sport and coaching taking into account the three styles, experiences, and worldviews. This allows coaches to develop a balance that is right for their individual coaching style for their sport and their athletes. Just as in the teaching model of differentiated instruction described in a previous section, there are indications through the literature that there are likenesses between the teaching and coaching approaches.

Motivation

Motivation is defined as an act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something, the act or process of **motivating** someone, the condition of being eager to act or work, the condition of being **motivated**, and a force or influence that causes someone to do something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Souders (2021) explained that understanding motivation gives us insight into human nature and explains why we set goals, strive for achievement and power, desire for relationships, and experience emotions like fear, anger, and compassion. Souders said that finding ways to increase motivation is important in allowing us to change behaviors, develop competencies, be creative, set goals, grow interests, make plans, develop talents, and boost engagement and that applying this knowledge helps to motivate employees, coach athletes, raise children, counsel clients, and engage students. Souders described the benefits of motivation as our need to take corrective action in the face of fluctuating circumstances and is a vital resource that pushes us to adapt, function productively, and maintain well-being when faced with changes or opportunities and/or threats. Souders also explained that our functioning and well-being suffer when motivation is depleted.

The two types of motivation are extrinsic and intrinsic. Cherry and Gans (2019) defined extrinsic motivation as behavior that is driven by external rewards like money, fame, grades, and praise that arise from sources outside of the individual. Deci and Ryan (2008) said that the Self-Determination Theory explains how external rewards and praises sometimes produce positive effects on motivation but can sometimes be detrimental because the hidden cost of certain rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation by decreasing one's sense of autonomy and competence. Souders (2021) quoted Reeve (2018), who said there is a tradeoff between satisfying and undermining the need for competence when we offer rewards; therefore, we should encourage competence without threatening the sense of autonomy by reserving rewards when not expected. Cherry and Morin (2019) defined intrinsic motivation as behaviors that are driven by internal rewards that arise from within the individual because it is naturally satisfying.

Souders referenced Deckers (2014), noting that today we know that intrinsic motivation affects the quality of behavior more, while extrinsic motivation influences the quantity more. It has also been shown that intrinsically motivated goal pursuit has greater long-term outcomes because it satisfies our psychological needs for autonomy and competence and, in turn, creates more positive states which reinforce the positive feedback loop and increase the likelihood of repetition (Reeve, 2018, as cited in Souders, 2021). Cherry and Morin explained that there is an importance of intrinsic motivation in education; and they identified challenge, curiosity, control, cooperation and competition, and recognition as key factors. Cherry and Morin made note of the importance, however, that a number of factors can influence whether external awards increase or decrease intrinsic motivation. Pivotal Education (2020) explained that any analysis of student achievement must include an examination of what drives their behavior (their motivation). Chickering and Kuh (2005) further explained the key to persistence and learning that last is to help clarify one's purpose and then find and/or create the combined educational experiences that can lead to the desired outcomes.

Clark (2004) stated that as educators, we must remember that when times are rough and difficulties arise through the learning and growing process, we have to stand strong and remain committed to doing whatever is necessary to raise our children with optimism, understanding, and love. Clark (2004) also explained that passion is why teachers and parents devote their lives to raising children, and it is the fire in their hearts and the determination in their minds that make a difference. Clark (2004) said that one teacher really can make an impact that will inspire and motivate children. Clark (2003) wrote about a student who was disrespectful and refused to complete work until the

teacher showed up at his weekend sporting event. The student realized that the teacher cared and respected the child's activities. This motivated the student to care about his work from that point forward. Clark (2003) said it seems simple, and it is simple; once students know you care, dealing with them is easier and more productive with more meaningful experiences.

Foudy (2017) interviewed former player, Michelle Akers of the 1999 women's national soccer team who said that Tony DiCicco, 1994-1999 women's national soccer team coach, saw outside of the box, that he saw potential for her and all the team, and that he gave it life. Akers said DiCicco took limitations and turned them around into something greater for all of them, and that was one of his gifts (Foudy, 2017). Goldsmith (2020) wrote that motivation is the desire that is the fire that fuels great performances, outstanding victories, persistence, perseverance, determination, and drive. Goldsmith went on to explain that motivation is the reason some athletes have a winning attitude, mental toughness, and strong character and is the energy that drives athletes to complete the toughest and most challenging and exhausting tasks. Goldsmith said that motivation is the cornerstone of success for every great athlete and their achievements. Finally, it is safe to say from the literature that teaching and coaching both benefit from motivation being intertwined and interconnected.

Historical Background of Differentiated Instruction in the Classroom

Anderson (2007) said that differentiated instruction is regarded as an effective teaching tool to meet the diverse academic needs of learners. Research explains and supports that when students are in responsive classrooms where they are viewed as individuals and their learning is supported, their attitudes and academic successes

improve (Ryan & Cooper, 2007). It is a process where teachers enhance learning by matching student learning characteristics and needs to instruction and assessment allowing students to access the same classroom curriculum through entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that are tailored to their needs (Hall et al., 2003). Differentiated instruction is not a single strategy, but rather an approach to instruction that incorporates and implements a variety of strategies (Hall et al., 2003). Small group instruction, however, goes against what we know as "equal to all." It goes against what we have been engrained to think is morally, socially, ethically, and educationally fair. Stroup (2009, as cited in Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010), a doctoral student at The University of Virginia, said, "we often misconstrued the notion of equal access to education to mean that all students should receive precisely the same pacing, resources, and instruction" (p. 12).

Though numbers of how many teachers use differentiated instruction with fidelity versus those who do not are not available, what we can ask is, "Are the needs of ALL students being met?" According to North Carolina third- through fifth-grade reading data presented in Chapter 1, the questions are raised. We know that proficiency alone does not indicate if needs are being met. This is why we also need to look at growth. According to the growth within a local district, they received the green check for 10 of 13 sites. Though this is encouraging, it raises questions as to whether or not the district is promoting and producing growth at a fast enough pace to close the gap towards proficiency. If we truly are, why is the proficiency percentage so low? The influence of this comparative research of teaching styles versus coaching styles as it relates to successful outcomes could provide a great segue into further research locally and beyond.

Differentiated instruction is defined by The Iris Center (2019) through the

National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum as a process to approach teaching

and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize

each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where they are,

rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum (Hall, 2002).

Many experts and practitioners recognize that the research itself on differentiated

instructions is limited (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Anderson, 2007; Hall, 2002); however,

there is solid research on specific practices that provide confirming support of

differentiation. Huebner (2010) discussed this and defined such specific practices as

including the use of effective classroom management, promoting student engagement and

motivation, assessing student readiness, responding to learning styles, grouping students

for instruction, and teaching to the student's zone of proximal development (Allan &

Tomlinson, 2000; Ellis & Worthington, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) zone

of proximal development is defined as the distance between what a learner can

demonstrate without assistance and what the learner can do with assistance. Tomlinson

and Strickland (2005) described that teachers do this by adjusting one or more of the

three components of instruction. These three components are content, process, and

product. They adjust the content, which is what the student learns; the process, which is

how the student learns; and/or the product, which is how the student applies the

knowledge to show mastery of the information. Based on this research, Huebner went on

to explain that there is no one-size-fits-all model for differentiated instruction, and it

differs based on student prior knowledge, interests, and abilities in that given classroom.

Experts (Anderson, 2007; Rock et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2000) suggested a focus on the

essential ideas and skills of the content, a response to individual student differences

(learning styles, prior knowledge, interests, and levels of engagement), the flexible

grouping of students based on the differences, an integration of ongoing relevant

assessments with the instruction, and continuous assessment to guide instruction and

meet the needs of students. Tomlinson's (1999b) examination of the implementation of

differentiated instruction at both the school and district levels led to her

recommendations. Tomlinson (1999b) recommended that for successful implementation,

leadership must have a solid understanding of the concept in order to fully and coherently

present it to teachers and school leadership. The implementation should then be nurtured

with different teaching models to encourage teachers to apply this concept with

flexibility, creativity, and choice while providing high-quality professional development

and time for collaboration, planning, and implementation of this philosophical approach

(Tomlinson, 1999b).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) identified and defined how differentiated

instruction is misunderstood and how it really is in reality. Tomlinson and Imbeau

explained that differentiation is misunderstood to be a set of instructional strategies, when

in fact it is a philosophy. Tomlinson and Imbeau explained that it is a way of thinking and

a set of principles about teaching and learning, not a specific model or design alone.

Tomlinson and Imbeau supported that differentiated instruction is not something a district

or school leaders can simply tell or show teachers how to do; instead, it is a process of

one rethinking their classroom practices from an ongoing process of trial, reflection, and

adjustments made within the classroom itself. Tomlinson and Imbeau went on to clarify

that differentiation is not something a teacher does or does not do; instead, it is the way

teachers pay attention to student variations and responses and then respond in some way

by proactively planning instruction to consistently address student differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile. Tomlinson and Imbeau finally explained that even though differentiation is an instructional approach, it is not just about instruction. Tomlinson and Imbeau explained that effective differentiated instruction must be accompanied with and is inseparable from a positive learning environment, high-quality curriculum, assessment to inform teacher decision-making, and flexible classroom management while understanding that the degree to which any one of those elements is weak, the others are also diminished.

Masten (2017) wrote the following key elements of differentiated instruction released by the ASCD. Masten said that differentiation can be described as a classroom approach with a balanced emphasis on individual students and course content while understanding that students differ as learners in terms of background experience, culture, language, gender, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning, support systems for learning, self-awareness as a learner, confidence as a learner, independence as a learner, and a host of other ways. These differences profoundly impact how students learn and the nature of scaffolding they will need at various points in the learning process. Masten then explained that teachers have a responsibility to ensure all their students master important content and to make specific and continually evolving plans to connect each learner with key content and are required to understand the nature of each of their students as they relate to the nature of the content being taught. The flexible teaching approach of differentiation "makes room" for student variance. Instead of expecting students to modify themselves to the curriculum, a flexible approach modifies the curriculum and how it is presented and implemented to the student (Hall et

al., 2003). Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) suggested that teachers should continually ask, "What does *this* student need at *this* moment in order to be able to progress with *this* key content, and what do I need to do to make that happen"? At the core of the classroom practice of differentiation is the modification of four curriculum-related elements—content, process, product, and affect—which are based on three categories of student need and variance—readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is defined by The Iris Center (2019) through the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum as a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. Masten (2017) wrote the following key elements of differentiated instruction released by the ASCD. Masten said that differentiation can be described as a classroom approach with a balanced emphasis on individual students and course content while understanding that students differ as learners in terms of background experience, culture, language, gender, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning, support systems for learning, self-awareness as a learner, confidence as a learner, independence as a learner, and a host of other ways. These differences profoundly impact how students learn and the nature of scaffolding they will need at various points in the learning process (Masten, 2017). Masten then explained that teachers have a responsibility to ensure all their students master important content and to make specific and continually evolving plans to connect each learner with key content and are required to understand the nature of each of their students as they relate to the nature of the content being taught. The flexible teaching

approach of differentiation allows for student variance (Masten, 2017).

Access Center (2004) explained the method in which teachers are able to enhance learning by matching student characteristics to the instruction and the assessments is differentiated instruction, also known as differentiation. There is differentiation of content, meaning a change in the material; differentiation of process, meaning a change in the way a student accesses information/material; and differentiation in product, meaning the way in which a student shows what they have learned (Access Center, 2004). Access Center went on to say that when a teacher differentiates, it is in response to a student's readiness, interest, and/or learning profile.

Access Center (2004) also explained that in differentiated instruction, instructional approaches should vary and adapt to the student as an individual. Understood for All, Inc. (2020) told us that the terms accommodation and modification are very often used interchangeably when referring to special efforts made in adjusting to the needs of an individual or individuals who need help in achieving or learning something specific. In the educational setting, you will hear those words, especially when referencing a student's IEP or 504 plan (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). Though the terms sound similar, they have very different meanings (Understood for All, Inc., 2020).

Accommodations are changes in how a student learns material (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). In a classroom setting, these are changes that allow the students to meet the same expectations with the same material but with variations in how they access and learn the material to meet the expectations (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). An example would be that a student with dyslexia may listen to an audio version of the same book the class is reading (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). This would allow the student to meet the

same comprehension expectations and participate in class discussions just like everyone else. Accommodations can also be allowed in testing sessions and specialized classes like gym, art, and music. It is allowing a student to reach the same destination by taking a different pathway.

Modifications are changes in what a student is taught or expected to learn (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). In a classroom, modifications would be when there is a need to change the curriculum to meet students where they are in their learning. An example of this would be assigning struggling readers a reading assignment with a lower Lexile text. Another example could be working in a one-on-one or small group setting to work on a more foundational level skill while those in the class on a higher level work on an independent reading task. Modifications can also work in testing sessions. For classroom tests, it may be that the student has a different level of spelling words for the week. For standardized testing, it may be they qualify to take an alternative test. Assignments in specialized classes like gym, art, and music are also possible if needed. For example, a gym teacher might reduce the number of laps a student needs to run, or a music teacher may not require a student to learn to read the music (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). Understood for All, Inc. (2020) offered a list of commonly used accommodations and modifications.

Differentiated Instruction – Reading

Access Center (2004) said that differentiated instructional strategies applied to reading can be established and designed in a way that helps students learn such reading skills as phonics, comprehension, fluency, word predictions, and story predictions. Access Center went on to explain some strategies that can be used for implementation

can be tiered assignments, compacting, interest centers/groups, flexible grouping, learning contracts, and choice boards.

Tiered assignments are designed with the content and objectives being the same but using a varied process to instruct students on essential skills that are provided at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness (Access Center, 2004).

Compacting is adjusting instruction to account for previous mastery and involves assessment and customized plans for continued standard skill development and enrichment/accelerated study (Access Center, 2004).

Interest centers/groups are set up so that learning experiences are aligned with specific learner interests and can be established in a center style (typically for younger learners) or a group style (typically for older students; Access Center, 2004).

Flexible grouping is when students work in different leveled groups based on readiness for the specific task/content (Access Center, 2004). Scholastic (2018) defined an example of this to be guided reading as an instructional classroom approach that meets the various needs of all students. The delivery approach involves the teacher working with a small group of students who demonstrate through their observations and data very similar reading behaviors (Scholastic, 2018). Groups will vary in size due to the needs of the students. Only students with like reading behaviors and levels will be grouped together. Scholastic explained that the goal of the model is not to teach a specific text but to teach reading strategies students can then apply to all texts with the main goal being students master these strategies in an effort to become fluent readers.

Learning contracts are agreements between the teacher and student which specify the skills expected to be learned, required components of the assignment, and the

methods in which the student will complete the task (Access Center, 2004). Access

Center (2004) explained that learning contracts allow students to work at an appropriate

pace, target their learning style, and work independently while building planning skills

and eliminating unnecessary practices.

Choice boards are organizers that contain a variety of activities for students to

choose from as they work through skills and develop products (Access Center, 2004).

Access Center (2004) explained that such choice boards can be organized in a way that

requires students to choose options that focus on several different focus skills.

Minero (2019) described six reading strategies specific to the elementary being

choral reading, cross-grade reading buddies, ear reading, teaching academic English,

choice reading, and fluency-oriented instruction. Strategies like choral reading and ear

reading help to improve a student's reading fluency, while expanding their vocabulary

and increasing their confidence (Minero, 2019).

Differentiated Instruction Model

A very popular and effective differentiated instruction implementation model for

reading is known as guided reading. Ford and Opitz (2011) wrote that the concept was

first published in 1996 by Fountas and Pinnell. Ford and Opitz went on to say that this is

when guided reading shifted from just an instructional technique to the use of small

groups for specific instructional needs. Scholastic (2018) defined guided reading as an

instructional classroom approach that meets the various needs of all students. The

delivery approach involves the teacher working with a small group of students who

demonstrate through their observations and data very similar reading behaviors. Groups

will vary in size due to the needs of the students. Only students with like reading

behaviors and levels will be grouped together. Scholastic explained that the goal of the model is not to teach a specific text but to teach reading strategies students can then apply to all texts. The main goal is that students master these strategies in an effort to become fluent readers.

There is a breakdown in teachers having access to properly learn the philosophy and implementation of truly differentiated instruction. Corley (2005) explained that the biggest challenges facing teachers and the implementation of differentiated instruction are time, classroom management, the changing role of the teacher, and teachers having access to the new and necessary strategies to support the implementation. There are training models for differentiated instruction, but teachers must seek them out. It is not automatically built into school or district professional development; and even though some content programs build in a "differentiated" section within lessons, it is not truly differentiated instruction unless the teacher really understands the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction. Arndt (2007) defined a core reading program as one that is used to help guide both the initial and differentiated instruction in a regular classroom, supports instruction in the broad range of reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) required to become skilled readers, and contains teacher manuals with explicit lesson plans. Not included, however, is the philosophical background and approach that must be understood and included. It could be mistaken and not truly implemented to its full design without that understanding. Small group instruction is not truly differentiated instruction unless the teacher customizes the small groups based on the individual student needs and ensures that the correct students are working within the correct small group to support their needs with the correct supportive

material.

Accommodations and Modifications

The terms accommodation and modification are very often used interchangeably when referring to special efforts made in adjusting to the needs of an individual or individuals who need help in achieving or learning something specific. In the educational setting, you will hear those words, especially when referencing a student's IEP or 504 plan (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). Though the terms sound similar, they have very different meanings (Understood for All, Inc., 2020).

Accommodations are changes in how a student learns material (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). In a classroom setting, these are changes that allow the students to meet the same expectations with the same material but with variations in how they access and learn the material to meet the expectations. An example would be that a student with dyslexia may listen to an audio version of the same book the class is reading (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). This would allow the student to meet the same comprehension expectations and participate in class discussions just like everyone else. Accommodations can also be allowed in testing sessions and specialized classes like gym, art, and music. It is allowing a student to reach the same destination by taking a different pathway.

Modifications are changes in what a student is taught or expected to learn (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). In a classroom, modifications would be when there is a need to change the curriculum to meet students where they are in their learning. An example of this would be assigning struggling readers a reading assignment with a lower Lexile text. Another example could be working in a one-on-one or small group setting to work on a more foundational level skill while those in the class on a higher level work on

an independent reading task. Modifications can also work in testing sessions. For classroom tests, it may be that the student has a different level of spelling words for the week. For standardized testing, it may be they qualify to take an alternative test. Assignments in specialized classes like gym, art, and music are also possible if needed. For example, a gym teacher might reduce the number of laps a student needs to run, or a music teacher may not require a student to learn to read the music (Understood for All, Inc., 2020). Understood for All, Inc. (2020) offered a list of commonly used accommodations and modifications.

Conceptual Framework: UDL

Meyer et al. (2014) explained that UDL is a pedagogical framework that aims to provide equal and inclusive learning experiences for all students and caters to differences in learning styles. UDL presents ways of thinking about teaching and learning with a mindset and understanding that give all students equal access to success (Morin, 2020). UDL operates with all of the information that it offers with the overall goal being to utilize a variety of teaching methods in a flexible approach that provides all students the opportunity to succeed (Morin, 2020). It offers a multitude of suggestions and resources to meet the needs of all students with the three main principles being representation, action and expression, and engagement (Morin, 2020). UDL is based on the neurological understanding of the needs of individual learners (Rose et al., 2006). UDL "focuses on eliminating barriers through initial designs that consider the needs of diverse people, rather than overcoming barriers later in individual adaptation" (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136).

Al-Azawei et al. (2016) presented an analysis of journal papers collected from 2012-2015 in the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. This analysis

presented information on the concepts that learners have varying characteristics, preferences, needs, and abilities naturally and that these have an impact on their academic performances and learning experiences. The comparison is made of learner diversity with that of a human rights perspective in that learner diversity crosses physical, visual, hearing, sensory, attention, and communication impairments (Burgstahler, 2011). According to the United Nations (2006), "Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability" (para. 2). According to Rose and Meyer (2002), the comprehensive view of the UDL framework was inspired by the principles of universal design. According to the Center for Universal Design (2015), the phrase universal design came along in the 1970s by Ronald Mace and referred to "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (para. 1). Evolving from this idea, Rose et al. (2006) went on to explain that the development and focus of UDL are to focus on and adjust the accessibility of content and the accessibility of a learning environment overall versus the limitations of an individual learner. Courey et al. (2012) clarified that UDL does recognize the uniqueness of learners and the differences in learner processes, but UDL focuses on environmental and curricula design that minimizes the effects of the divergence of learners. Al-Azawei et al. summed up UDL as an effort to reduce learning barriers and aiming to move from a "teacher-centered" approach to a "learner-centered" approach by representing content representation and implementation, knowledge expression, and learner engagement by multiple means, accessibility, and learner

inclusion.

Al-Azawei et al. (2016) concluded that comparison with the notion that teaching directly from a one-size-fits-all model will not accommodate the individual learning differences or the divergence within the learning capabilities; instead, UDL focuses on the main theories to accommodate educational content and environment in accordance with individual learner preference, eliminating the need for adaptations after the fact.

Synthesis of the Literature

This review was intended to familiarize one with the teaching philosophy of differentiated instruction and the effective coaching psychology and methods behind successful high school coaches. The first half of this review is dedicated to differentiated instruction. The literature review supports that differentiated instruction is indeed a philosophical teaching approach that meets students where they are (Hall, 2002). It is within a truly differentiated classroom that the differences and variances of the learners are embraced and learning is increased by responsive teaching (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998). The second half of this review is dedicated to effective coaching at the high school level. Fracassa (2018, as cited in Goricki, 2018) said though he was not the best player on the team, he learned to be the best he could be because his coaches taught him.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.c) defined planning as the act or process of making or carrying out plans. Planning for differentiated instruction means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs; and regardless of whether the differentiation is content, process, products, or learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction (Tomlinson, 1995, 1999a; Winebrenner,

1992, 1996). Campbell (2014, as cited in Holcolm, 2014) supported that planning for football means "adapting to the talent you have" (para. 10) to scaffold skill development in all areas.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.a) also defined implementation as the process of making something active or effective. Tomlinson (2014) said that differentiated instruction is implementing an overall approach to teaching with a focus on learning beginning with the needs of the students, the readiness of the students, and the interests of the students and then adapting the lesson plans to include those needs into the structure and framework of the class, creating student-centered teaching. Hanson (2016) described several coaching implementation models for team development. These models individually and collectively all in some way replicate and support similar components and phases of differentiated instruction in theory if not in explicit definition.

This literature review supports that one correlation could be identified between the differentiated reading instructional model of guided reading and Tuckerman's Stages of Team Development model. As described previously, there are five stages to this model. The forming stage takes place when a team is first developed and meets for the first time, just as when a teacher is first developing small guided reading groups based on an understanding of the skills within their classroom. The storming stage is when team members compete with each other for status and acceptance of ideas, just as seen in initial small guided reading groups when students are beginning to find their place and voice within the groups and within the tasks. The norming stage is then when the team begins to function more effectively as a team and is no longer focused on individual goals but is working together for team goals, just as seen in small guided reading groups as

students develop into more of a learning community working towards the common goals of the given skills. The performing stage is the stage where the team is functioning at a very high level, just as seen in small guided reading groups when the students are mastering skills with automaticity. The adjourning stage is the stage that comes with the end of the season, just as seen in small guided reading groups when mastery has been achieved and new groupings must be developed.

This review leaves us knowing that literature identifies and supports the concepts of differentiated instruction and effective coaching. This literature review supports that effective coaching includes many of the ideals and characteristics used to describe differentiated instruction. Just a few areas that can be aligned for comparison are the characteristics of good coaching identified earlier in this chapter. Stuart (2013) identified leadership, knowledge of fundamentals, inspiration, knowledge of players, consistency, data analysis, and automaticity as key features necessary in successful coaching.

We know literature supports the importance of differentiated instruction as a philosophical approach to educational delivery and curriculum implementations. Components of this philosophy have been identified as content, process, product, and affect/learning environment, understanding that student needs are guided by readiness, interests, and learning profile (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). We know UDL presents ways of thinking about teaching and learning with a mindset and understanding that give all students equal access to success (Morin, 2020). We also know literature supports that successful coaches study data and scaffold player and team development using differentiated strategies. Campbell (2014, as cited in Holcolm, 2014) said, "adapting to the talent we had was the best thing we did" (para. 10). This simple statement

summarizes the overall philosophy and mindset not only behind good coaching but also differentiated instruction. Additionally, we know literature supports the role of motivation in both the academic and athletic worlds as it is a crucial part of understanding the insight into one's overall human nature (Souders, 2021).

In closing this review, we are still left wondering why teachers do not buy into the teaching philosophy of differentiated instruction when the high school coaching world thrives with the components of this philosophical concept. Is it that we have not viewed differentiated instruction from this perspective? Is it that we are overcomplicating the concept? Are we not viewing our classrooms as a place to "win?" Could a new perspective open our minds to truly accepting and buying into this concept? Winning is defined as the act of one that wins a victory (Merriam-Webster, n.d.e). Growing students to reach their maximum level of development is a victory in the classroom. The ultimate goal of teaching is to grow students to those levels just as the ultimate goal of a football coach is to develop and grow his players to reach their maximum level of performance. Could changing our perception to view teaching more like coaching allow us to address and solve our initial problem statement and answer the question of whether or not we are serving ALL students in order for each child to maximize their growth towards reading proficiency? Will the parallels between the educational setting and the coaching setting be strong enough to support this change of perception? How extensive are the parallels? Sometimes we need to see a concept work in another field, industry, division, etc. to see its benefits before we bring it to what we do every day. Flanagan (2019) wrote of teacher and coach, Vicky Tong, who stated that though teaching and coaching are different, her experience in the classroom made her a better coach, and what she learned working with

athletes made her better in the classroom.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Design of the Study

The general approach to carrying out this study was to conduct a comparative study of the parallels between the sports psychology influence in planning styles of athletic coaches and the way in which classroom teachers utilize differentiated instructional approaches. In this qualitative study, the design was an analysis of interview questions, surveys, and document analysis to answer the central research question and the associated subquestions.

Research Questions

The central research question, "What are common strategies between differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology," asked if there are common strategies between differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology.

Additional subquestions were developed to delve deeper into the central research questions:

1. How do elementary reading teachers define/articulate differentiated instruction?

2. How do athletic coaches define/articulate effective (differentiated) coaching?

3. What are the similarities in the strategies used by elementary teachers and athletic coaches when preparing for the next grade level or the next opponent?

4. How do elementary reading teachers describe the role of motivation?

5. How do athletic coaches describe the role of motivation?

These questions were developed to examine the parallels between differentiated

instruction and effective coaching methodology, how differentiated instruction

implemented through a coaching style supports academic growth, and how instructional

implementation compares to the planning and coaching methods of high school athletic

coaches.

These questions were answered and supported by the data collected and analyzed

from the interviews, surveys, and document analysis of plans explained in the above

sections.

The study intended to reveal the parallels between the two planning and

implementation approaches. Some might assume these two worlds are very different with

little to no correlation. This study intended to use the unlikely comparison to change the

way teachers think of the differentiated instructional approach in the elementary reading

classroom. It was the desired outcome that this design would influence and possibly

reshape the way educators think of the differentiated instructional approach and begin to

look at teaching more from an athletic coaching perspective in an effort to ensure they are

truly serving all students.

Role of the Researcher

The research plan was to interview, survey, and complete document analyses of

athletic coaches and successful classroom teachers as to their planning and

implementation actions using tools specifically designed to answer the central question

and subquestions. The information gathered was compared and linked to differentiated

instructional methods to determine parallels between the two instructional worlds by

aligning responses to the focus research questions. Student data were not used in this

study, only methods of planning and implementing instruction. There were no issues with

confidentiality. The researcher either knew of or had colleague connections with all participants. Participants in the study were carefully selected to ensure that there was no professional conflict of interest. Some selected participants worked at schools within the same district as the researcher, but there was no participant selected from within the same site or team or that the researcher ever supervised. Participants were also selected from outside of the researcher's district.

Pilot Group

In (2017) defined a pilot group as the first step in an entire research protocol that is often a smaller-sized study to assist with planning and modifications of the main study. Specifically designed interview and survey questions were reviewed by a select pilot group of three area coaches and three classroom teachers to determine the clear questioning. The pilot group in this study ensured the questions were formatted in a way to generate answers intended by this research to answer the central question and subquestions. Any misconceptions or misunderstandings were addressed, and questioning was reevaluated following the pilot trial. The only change that was noted by two pilot participants was to add the word "performance" before data. It was suggested by two coaches that the phrase "performance data" was clearer in that respective field. That change was made in the noted areas.

Participants

The participants of this study include four instructional elementary teachers and four high school football coaches who have proven successful records and are also licensed teachers. Coaches participating in this study were deemed successful if they had a winning record within a minimum of the past 4 of 5 years or in the final 4 of 5 years of

their careers. This means that for the past 5 years or their final 5 years of coaching, their programs recorded more wins than losses in 4 of the 5 years. Teachers in this study were deemed successful by their administrators. It was suggested that administrators reference, but not be limited to, those with successful EVAAS scores in the past 4 of 5 years. EVAAS primarily focuses on growth measures for individual students assigned to individual teachers, so the scores will not necessarily equate to the overall proficiency levels; however, for this study, teachers who were successfully producing significant growth among their students were fit for participation.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Teacher Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Grade	Area
T1	Female	W	2	ENC-1
T2	Female	W	K	ENC-1
T3	Female	W	1	ENC-1
T4	Female	B	1	ENC-2

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Coach Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Sport	Area
C1	Female	W	Softball/volleyball	ENC-3
C2	Male	W	Swimming/track	ENC-1
C3	Male	W	Football	WNC-1
C4	Male	B	Basketball	ENC-1

These individuals were asked identical interview questions, answered identical surveys, and had similar document analyses done with respect to their area. All subjects were asked to participate voluntarily with the understanding that their identity and any personal data records would be kept confidential. If any subject elected not to participate,

another subject was selected. Subjects were identified and asked to participate upon the

granted approval for the research to be conducted.

Data Collection

Answers to interview questions (Appendix A) were collected by audio recording

or digital response, results of given surveys (Appendix B) were collected, and

observations of three randomly selected practice plans were collected from each athletic

coach. The information was analyzed to determine the connection to differentiated

instructional practices. Identical interviews, surveys, and document analysis of four

randomly selected lesson plans were collected from four elementary reading teachers

regarding their planning approaches using differentiated instructional practices. Research

data were collected and coded. The audio recordings were then transcribed. Data were

initially audio recorded, but research supported transcribing software was utilized

following data collection.

First, interview questions focused on the planning and implementation styles of

coaches as well as teachers. The questions that follow supported answering the

subquestions outlined in Chapter 1 and provided a pathway to determine patterns and/or

themes that then supported answering the central question of this research.

1. How do you analyze weekly performance data?

2. What do you look for in this analysis?

3. How do the findings from this data analysis assist and/or influence your plans

   for the upcoming week?

4. What are the differences in the way you teach/coach all students/players?

5. How do you differentiate the way you teach/coach all students/players?

6. What steps would you recommend as important pathways to differentiated instruction/coaching?

7. How do you define effective planning for effective differentiated teaching/coaching?

8. How do you overcome student/player limitations?

9. How does motivation factor into your approach/plans?

10. Do you implement motivational activities? Explain.

Second, surveys focused on the comfort/understanding level of each participating teacher and coach on each concept included in the interview questions. The concepts that were surveyed were data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/coaching, and motivation. Each participant's comfort/understanding level of each concept was supported in the interview responses.

Additionally and finally, document analyses were conducted of three randomly selected lesson planning guides from each teacher and three randomly selected practice plans from each coach. Analyzing these guides and plans showed how the concepts and practices are actually put in place. This finalized, grounded, and provided a third data point in this triangular approach. Fontana and Frey (2000) concluded that interviews hold a rich history of providing insight, noting that individuals are largely familiar with the interviewing sequence as it is similar to the routines of everyday talk. Frey (2018) stated that document analysis is a form of qualitative research that uses systematic procedures to analyze document evidence and answer select research questions. Frey also noted that when used in triangulation with interviews and surveys, document analyses can

corroborate or refute findings.

These three data points answered the comfort and understanding level of the participants with each concept, their knowledge and views on each concept, and how they plan for implementation of these concepts. The themes and patterns that emerged from these three data points collectively provided an answer to the central question of identifying common strategies and differences between differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology. The three data points answered and supported the research questions as follows in the below matrix. This matrix guided the data analysis portion of this research to ensure alignment of each data point with the central question and the subquestions.

Table 3

Research Question Evidence Matrix

Evidences	Central Question	Sub-question 1	Sub-question 2	Sub-question 3	Sub-question 4	Sub-question 5
Survey Item 1	*			*		
Survey Item 2	*			*		
Survey Item 3	*			*		
Survey Item 4	*	*	*			
Survey Item 5	*			*		
Survey Item 6	*	*	*			
Survey Item 7	*				*	*
Interview Item 1	*			*		
Interview Item 2	*			*		
Interview Item 3	*			*		
Interview Item 4	*	*	*	*		
Interview Item 5	*	*	*	*		
Interview Item 6	*			*		
Interview Item 7	*	*	*	*		
Interview Item 8	*			*	*	*
Interview Item 9	*				*	*
Interview Item 10	*				*	*
Document analysis	*			*	*	*

Data Analysis

The interview questions that are identified in the data collection section were given to a select group of four successful teachers of differentiated reading instruction at the elementary level and four successful high school athletic coaches. The answers to these questions were compared and sorted into categories and analyzed for identifying patterns as well as divergence. The information was sorted by question. Within each question, answers from coaches were looked at together and answers from teachers were looked at together. The answers were then cross-analyzed within each question category. Common themes, strategies, and/or patterns were identified for comparison as well as divergence among the answers. Similarly, survey results were cross-analyzed within each category to determine support or lack thereof for the common themes, strategies, and/or patterns that emerged. The observational protocol in observing the randomly selected plans was compared and analyzed to find supporting evidences and additional themes, strategies, and/or patterns. I reviewed for evidence of differentiated instruction in both the lesson plans from the teachers and the practice plans of the coaches. As stated in the data collection section of this paper, the data collected aided in answering the subquestions. The themes and patterns that emerged from the collected data supported answering the central question. This comparison from three different angles provided a triangular look at commonalities and/or differences. This triangular approach provided a solid comparison.

As stated earlier, during my years as an academic coach and classroom teacher and over those same years watching my husband coach high school sports, it was realized and became evident that teaching is a lot like coaching. The setting was selected not only

because of the personal experiences but because of the belief that the comparison is unique. It is believed that the data collected here provide a comparison that may influence and change the way educators think of our instructional planning and delivery in the classroom. Again, perception is reality. The hope is that this comparison will influence the way we view and understand differentiated instruction.

Research Procedure

Interviews were conducted and answers were collected from four high school athletic coaches with successful records over the past 5 years to determine the connection to data-driven differentiated instructional practices. Identical interviews were conducted with four elementary reading teachers who have demonstrated great growth and proficiency success over the past 5 years regarding their planning approaches using data-driven differentiated instructional practices. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted and answers were recorded and transcribed using Zoom meeting features. Jacobs (2019) explained that recording and transcribing interviews allows for one to have perfect recall of the interview questions and answers without relying on memory, allowing the researcher to adhere to the standard protocol qualitative research requires, including credibility, context, and transferability.

Research was collected on the concept of data-driven differentiated instructional practices. Responses were recorded via audio recording and later transcribed for further analysis. After several reads of the raw data, they were coded according to emerging themes. Given (2008) noted that emerging themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the lifeworld of research participants through the process of coding. Additionally, identical surveys and

document analyses were conducted with the same subjects to create a triangular approach of data collection. The themes served to answer the research questions.

Disclaimers

At no point in this research were there any risks for participants, nor was any information obtained through any deceptive practices or measures. The selected subjects were asked and participated only voluntarily. All identifying information of the subjects was held confidential at all phases of the research. No incentives were given for any reason throughout the research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research was to develop a pathway to positively

influence the implementation of differentiated instruction in elementary schools. By

developing an observable parallel between the systemic approaches of athletic coaches

and those of successful classroom teachers, it is hoped that more support or differentiated

instruction will be elevated. In this study, a comparison was done to uncover if and how

the differentiated instructional mindset and efforts in the K-3 reading classrooms align

with the mindset and efforts of athletic coaches in their data-driven planning and

implementation styles. The teachers and coaches researched in this study have all proven

successful in their respected areas. A determined parallel in approaches would support

the goal of this study, to prove that differentiated instruction may produce champions in

the classroom just as it does on the game field. The following research questions guided

this research:

Central Question: What are common strategies between differentiated

instructional practices and effective coaching methodology?

Subquestion 1: How do elementary reading teachers define/articulate

differentiated instruction?

Subquestion 2: How do athletic coaches define/articulate effective

(differentiated) coaching?

Subquestion 3: What are the similarities in the strategies used by elementary

teachers and athletic coaches when preparing for the next grade

level or the next opponent?

Subquestion 4:   How do elementary reading teachers describe the role of

motivation?

Subquestion 5:   How do athletic coaches describe the role of motivation?

These questions have been answered using a triangular data analysis approach

utilizing survey results, interview results, and document analysis of lesson plans from the

teacher participants and practice plans from the athletic coach participants. Table 3

defines how these data points support the research questions.

Description of Participants

The study was conducted using four elementary classroom reading teachers from

the grade range of K-3 and four high school athletic coaches from a diverse selection of

high school sports. Each participant was interviewed and surveyed. Sample lesson plans

and practice plans were analyzed. Data were collected from the interviews, surveys, and

sample plans. A close read of the data was followed by a full analysis. The data were

coded, and themes were determined.

The teacher participants represented grade level, race, and geographic diversity.

Additionally, the selected coaches represented gender, race, sport(s) coached, and

geographic diversity. Among the selected elementary reading teachers, there were four

females representing two races, three grade levels, and two different eastern North

Carolina counties. Among the selected coaches, there was one female and three males

representing two races, six high school sports, and two eastern and one western North

Carolina counties. Tables 1 and 2 show this demographic breakdown.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Teacher Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Grade	Area
T1	Female	W	2	ENC-1
T2	Female	W	K	ENC-1
T3	Female	W	1	ENC-1
T4	Female	B	1	ENC-2

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Coach Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Sport	Area
C1	Female	W	Softball/volleyball	ENC-3
C2	Male	W	Swimming/track	ENC-1
C3	Male	W	Football	WNC-1
C4	Male	B	Basketball	ENC-1

The following two sections within this chapter present the data collected for each research question. The first section will be the collected data from interviews of teachers and coaches that support each research question. Additionally, included in this section will be the results of data collected from surveys to all participants. The survey was designed to support and gauge participant level of comfort in the varying components of differentiated instruction that would in turn impact and help explain their interview responses. The second section explicates the results of document analyses conducted to determine the level of inclusion of these concepts in plans. The data obtained from the document analysis served to corroborate the interview and survey data. Participant names remain anonymous to ensure confidentiality. Quotes may have been shortened or edited for clarity and flow. Documents were also coded by participant and analyzed based on the established protocol, Appendix C.

Teacher and Coach Data by Research Question According to Interview (With Survey Support)

Survey Support

Prior to the interview process, all participants were sent a survey to gauge their understanding and comfort level in the areas of data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/coaching, and motivation. The understanding of these areas is a prerequisite factor in determining one's ability to implement instruction using the differentiated instructional mindset. The complete survey results follow and are also included within the sections for the research questions they most directly support.

Survey Results. When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of data collection, the survey results showed that 50% of the teachers understand and implement data collection comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. On the other hand, coach surveys revealed that 75% understand and implement data collection comfortably, while only 25% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of data analysis, survey results showed that 100% of participants understand and implement comfortably, while coach surveys revealed only 50% felt the same. The other 50% of coaches acknowledged that while they understand, they struggle with consistent implementation.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of data-driven planning, survey results showed that 25% understand and implement comfortably,

while 75% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. The survey results of the participating coaches revealed the opposite, with 75% understanding and implementing comfortably and 25% understanding but struggling with consistent implementation.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of differentiated planning, results revealed that 50% understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. The results from the surveyed coaches revealed the same.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of data-driven instruction/coaching, results revealed that 25% understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Coaches were the opposite, with results revealing that 75% understand and implement comfortably, while 25% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of differentiated instruction/coaching, survey results revealed that 25% understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Results from coach surveys revealed that 50% understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of student motivation, survey results revealed that 100% of participants understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Coach survey results, however, revealed that 100% of participants understand and implement comfortably.

Interview Results

The interview questions were designed to answer the research subquestions, which in turn collectively answered the central research question. The interview questions asked the following:

1. How do you analyze weekly performance data?

2. What do you look for in this analysis?

3. How do the findings from this data analysis assist and/or influence your plans for the upcoming week?

4. What are the differences in the way you teach/coach all students/players?

5. How do you differentiate the way you teach/coach all students/players?

6. What steps would you recommend as important pathways to differentiated instruction/coaching?

7. How do you define effective planning for effective differentiated teaching/coaching?

8. How do you overcome student/player limitations?

9. How does motivation factor into your approach/plans?

10. Do you implement motivational activities? Explain.

Woven into the findings are the survey results.

Subquestion 1: How Do Elementary Reading Teachers Define/Articulate

Differentiated Instruction?

This research question was answered and supported by Interview Questions 4, 5, and 7. All teachers who were interviewed answered that they do teach all students using the same information initially. Participant T4 stated, "that is the core instruction."

Additionally, all teachers who were interviewed also explained that beyond the whole group core instruction, they then differentiated based on student need in small group instructional sessions that spin from the core.

Participant T1 stated, "All of my students might get similar instructions or directions, but I often have to break down the information…into manageable chunks." Participant T1 also stated, "you have to think about your particular students and what seems to work well with each one of them and what doesn't."

Participant T2 stated, "Some students need more hands-on" and "small groups are based on their ability and where they are and what they need in order to grow."

Participant T3 stated, "everyone needs to learn our solid core and if that is strong, it might eliminate gaps." Participant T3 also stated, "differentiating instruction comes more naturally for some teachers especially after years of experience and it all comes from thoughtful strategic standards based on step-by-step planning." This participant also said, "some people are not as successful because they don't take their planning seriously."

Participant T4 stated, "I'm going to teach all students on the same plan, but I know what each needs to be successful." This participant also stated, "Know your data and know your students," when emphasizing effective planning.

Notably, the survey data revealed that when surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of differentiated planning, 50% understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of differentiated instruction/coaching, survey results revealed that 25% understand and implement

comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

Subquestion 2: How Do Athletic Coaches Define/Articulate Effective (Differentiated) Coaching?

This research question was answered and supported by Interview Questions 4, 5, and 7. Three questions in the interview addressed how coaches define/articulate effective (differentiated) coaching. Collectively, these questions answered this question by focusing on how coaches give directions to all players, how they differentiate the way they direct all players, and how they effectively plan for coaching all players.

Participant C1 indicated that you try to use the same directions initially, but "you might not be able to because you have advanced players and some that try but are not able to follow." This participant further explained that there are physical and intellectual differences in players and that requires different styles of explaining and coaching. This participant stated, "some players can just be told what to do, some need to be shown, and some need a full walk-through." Participant C1 defined effective planning for effective differentiated coaching as "using the numbers from game data." This participant indicated that game data are collected from watching films and reviewing statistics from each game. These data drive how they practice.

Participant C2 stated, "We have the same standard setup, but it's how we individualize so they can be successful in practices." This participant also stated, "To reach what you want to reach, you need to know the end goal." Additionally, Participant C2 stated, "we may make a plan for one player that is completely different than the other, but the whole game plan is to perform at our best at the end of the season."

Participant C3 stated, "Yes we start with the same directions, but we have 11

assistant coaches and each coach is given a position to work with." Additionally,

Participant C3 stated,

> Of course, we wouldn't coach every kid the same way as they are so different and
>
> we really want to make sure we know what the kids need as some need you to get
>
> after them and others need a pat on the back.

> Participant C4 stated, "When instructing the team as a whole we use the same

language and we simplify as much as possible due to the academic diversity of the

players we coach." Additionally, Participant C4 stated,

> We have incorporated in our practice plan individual skill development where
>
> each player can focus on themselves and our coaches can concentrate just on them
>
> allowing a great opportunity for one-on-one interaction where we break down
>
> their individual skill level based on our data to maximize their individual
>
> performance.

Participant C4 defined effective planning as "taking the amount of time you have and

maximize that time with realistic goals, knowing that there will be a tomorrow."

As shown earlier, the survey data revealed that when surveying coaches in regards

to their comfort and understanding of differentiated planning, 50% understand and

implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with consistent

implementation. When surveying coaches in regards to their comfort and understanding

of differentiated instruction/coaching, 50% understand and implement comfortably, while

50% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

Subquestion 3: What Are the Similarities in the Strategies Used by Elementary Teachers and Athletic Coaches When Preparing for the Next Grade Level or the Next Opponent?

This research question was answered and supported by Interview Questions 1-8. In analyzing weekly performance data, 100% of teachers and coaches indicated that they do analyze weekly data by looking at performance breakdowns and look for areas that need specific work. All participants, both teachers and coaches, indicated that the data analysis drives their plans for practices and skill development and influences plans for the upcoming week(s). Additionally, all participants discussed differentiating what and how they work with students and athletes, what pathways they deem important for effective instruction and coaching, and how they plan for direction and overcoming student limitations. In support of explaining the different ways students/players are taught/coached, teachers answered that they do teach all students using the same information initially. Coaches had very similar responses to teachers. Participant T4 stated, "that is the core instruction." Additionally, all teachers who were interviewed also explained that beyond the whole group core instruction, they then differentiated based on student need in small group instructional sessions that spin from the core. Again, participating coaches had similar responses regarding the initial whole group focus that then shifted to small group skill development focuses. All participants indicated their views on recommended pathways for differentiated teaching/coaching.

Teacher responses to Subquestion 3 are explained in the following paragraphs. Participant T1 explained looking for skill proficiency of 80% to determine if additional support is needed for that skill. This participant also stated,

It is particularly important to see if there is a particular part that the class is having trouble grasping a concept or if there are misconceptions that can be addressed in whole group instruction or in small group instructional sessions.

Participant T1 stated, "All of my students might get similar instructions or directions, but I often have to break down the information…into manageable chunks." Participant T1 also stated, "you have to think about your particular students and what seems to work well with each one of them and what doesn't." Additionally, this participant indicated that an important pathway would be to "provide a safe and nurturing environment" for the students as being a priority while meeting students where they are, encouraging them, and scaffolding lessons.

Participant T2 indicated, "the data is used to determine struggle skill areas." This participant indicated that this determines "who needs to be pulled and worked with for additional support going forward." Participant T2 stated, "Some students need more hands-on" and "small groups are based on their ability and where they are and what they need in order to grow." This participant stated that an important pathway to being effective is to "analyze and know the data." Finally, this participant included that seeing the students grow is what keeps the teacher motivation strong while keeping the students motivated using a lot of positive reinforcement.

Participant T3 indicated that the data "reveals areas and patterns of struggle." This participant stated this analysis is also a way to "look for growth in addition to confusion and misconceptions." In planning for the upcoming week and instructional skills, this participant explained using an online planning program where "taking notes of observations helps in planning the upcoming instruction of skills in the weeks to come."

Participant T3 stated, "everyone needs to learn our solid core and if that is strong, it might eliminate gaps." Participant T3 also stated, "differentiating instruction comes more naturally for some teachers especially after years of experience and it all comes from thoughtful strategic, standards-based, step-by-step planning." This participant also said, "some people are not as successful because they don't take their planning seriously." As for overcoming limitations, this participant indicated a strive to "make content attainable through some shape, form, or fashion in that child's way."

Participant T4 explained the importance of looking at the percentage of who understood a skill and who did not to indicate if it was an instructional delivery problem or isolated skill understanding issue. This participant stated, "if the majority struggled, that's on me and I have to go back and reteach." Additionally, this participant stated, "looking for mastery and confusion" comes from this analysis and assists in determining if "additional activities and/or games will help" support mastery of the skills. Additionally, this participant stated that an important pathway is to "know your content, know your content, plan, and let the children marinate in the learning." Participant T4 stated, "I'm going to teach all students on the same plan, but I know what each needs to be successful." This participant also stated, "Know your data and know your students," when emphasizing an important pathway for effective instruction. Additionally, this participant clearly stated that in overcoming limitations, "I don't make excuses for my students and I don't let them make excuses."

Coach responses to the same Subquestion 3 begin here and continue in the following paragraphs. Participants C1 and C3 discussed film review of previous games. Participant C1 stated, "for every game, I watch film and take stats." This participant went

on to explain that these stats are put into percentages that will drive the skill practices for the next practice. Additionally, these stats are "put into hard numbers and presented to the players to drive practices." Participant C1 indicated that you try to use the same directions initially, but "you might not be able to because you have advanced players and some that try but are not able to follow." This participant further explained that there are physical and intellectual differences in players and that require different styles of explaining and coaching. This participant stated, "some players can just be told what to do, some need to be shown, and some need a full walk-through." Participant C1 defined effective planning for effective differentiated coaching as "using the numbers from game data." This participant indicated that game data are collected from watching film and reviewing statistics from each game. These data drive how they practice. Last, this participant stated, "an important pathway to effective coaching is to spend a lot of time on the fundamentals."

Participant C2 stated, "performance data is tracked and analyzed over a 3-week basis to watch for progress." The performance and progress are then used to establish a practice that "works best for each kid." Participant C2 stated, "We have the same standard setup, but it's how we individualize so they can be successful in practices." This participant also stated, "To reach what you want to reach, you need to know the end goal." Additionally, Participant C2 stated, "we may make a plan for one player that is completely different than the other, but the whole game plan is to perform at our best at the end of the season." In defining an important pathway to effective coaching, this participant stated, "you have to gain the student's buy-in to what you are doing," and "the best way for them to understand is to see the success and progress."

Participant C3 stated, "in film review and practice session, we grade the kids on their skill areas just like you would in a classroom." Additionally, Participant C3 stated these numbers are used "specifically for skill positions to determine practice reps needed." Participant C3 stated, "Yes we start with the same directions, but we have 11 assistant coaches and each coach is given a position to work with." Additionally, Participant C3 stated,

> Of course, we wouldn't coach every kid the same way as they are so different and we really want to make sure we know what the kids need as some need you to get after them and others need a pat on the back.

As for important pathways to effective coaching, this participant stated, "always have a game plan."

Participant C4 indicated that the use of a technology program "assists in tracking every player during games and practices." This participant went on to say, "this information helps us to develop practice plans, analyze opponent weaknesses and evaluate player and opponent performances." This participant indicated that these data show "how well/bad we played as a team" and "what works for us as a team and in individual performance." Additionally, Participant C4 stated, "practices are structured based around weekly performance as we are looking to see if players have improved in the areas we concentrated on last week from game to game." Participant C4 stated, "When instructing the team as a whole we use the same language and we simplify as much as possible due to the academic diversity of the players we coach." Additionally, Participant C4 stated,

> We have incorporated in our practice plan individual skill development where

each player can focus on themselves and our coaches can concentrate just on them

allowing a great opportunity for one-on-one interaction where we break down

their individual skill level based on our data to maximize their individual

performance.

Participant C4 defined effective planning as "taking the amount of time you have and

maximize that time with realistic goals, knowing that there will be a tomorrow." In

explaining an important pathway to effective coaching, this participant stated the

importance of "getting to know everything about the kids athletically, academically, and

personally."

Survey support was found in Survey Questions 1-3. When surveying teachers in

regards to their comfort and understanding of data collection, the survey results showed

that 50% of the teachers understand and implement data collection comfortably, while

50% understand but struggle with implementation. Coach surveys revealed that 75%

understand and implement data collection comfortably, while only 25% understand but

struggle with consistent implementation. When surveying teachers in regards to their

comfort and understanding of data analysis, survey results showed that 100% of

participants understand and implement comfortably, while coach surveys revealed only

50% felt the same. The other 50% of coaches acknowledged that while they understand,

they struggle with consistent implementation. When surveying teachers in regards to their

comfort and understanding of data-driven planning, survey results showed that 25%

understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with

consistent implementation. Survey results of the participating coaches revealed the

opposite with 75% understanding and implementing comfortably and 25% understanding

but struggling with consistent implementation. When surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of data-driven instruction/coaching, results revealed that 25% understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Coaches were the opposite, with results revealing that 75% understand and implement comfortably and 25% understand but struggle with consistent implementation.

Subquestion 4: How Do Elementary Reading Teachers Describe the Role of Motivation (in Differentiated Instruction)?

This research question was answered and supported by Interview Questions 8, 9, and 10. The participants described the role of motivation in the latter part of the interview. A combination of overcoming student limitations and how motivation is factored into the approach and planning was questioned. All participants indicated the importance of motivation; but surprisingly, two participants included the importance of their own motivation as the primary source of motivation influence on the students.

Participant T2 said, "I want to see all of my students grow from the beginning of the year to the end, so that motivates me." This participant stated that student growth is her motivation. This participant stated that in motivating the students, positive reinforcement is in place.

Participant T3 said, "In overcoming student limitations, I plan to make success attainable in some shape, form, or fashion to make sure that they are always exposed to the learning and feeling successful." This participant also discussed that flexibility is embedded in the expectations and grading to allow for attainable success for all students. Participant T3 closed by stating, "You have to have motivation because your motivation

spreads to the students."

Participants T1 and T4 focused strictly on the motivation of the students in their answers. Participant T1 stated, "You have to know your particular students and what seems to work for them and what doesn't." This participant also stated, "You have to meet them where they are and this is where you have to start to encourage them and scaffold the lesson from there." Participant T4 stated, "You have to know your data and know your students to make sure you have all the components in place." This participant also stated, "I don't allow excuses and I let them know I'm here for them and I know they can do it even when it's hard."

As stated earlier, survey support was found when surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of motivation. Survey results revealed that 100% of participants understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Coach survey results, however, revealed that 100% of participants understand and implement comfortably.

Subquestion 5: How Do Athletic Coaches Describe the Role of Motivation?

This research question was answered and supported by Interview Questions 8, 9, and 10. The participants described the role of motivation in the latter part of the interview. A combination of overcoming player limitations and how motivation is factored into the approach and planning was questioned.

Participant C1 stated that when overcoming student limitations, "we practice a lot and find a role for the player's skill set." The participant also stated, "Motivation is huge and coaches have to go in like we got this, we are going to win because the players feed off of that and they need to believe in you as the coach."

Participant C2 stated, "It's really important to constantly change your plan" and "have the big goal in mind but at the same time being able to stop and regroup." As for how motivation factors in and is implemented, Participant C2 stated, "this is something that I work on in figuring out what I could do different to motivate." Additionally, this participant noted, "we practice hard, but will take a few minutes to break and have some fun too in order to keep them motivated."

Participant C3 stated that in overcoming limitations,

You have to evaluate your players and know their strengths and their weaknesses and spend time in the offseason to encourage their individual player development in order to try to develop and turn those limitations into at least adequate levels.

Additionally, Participant C3 stated, "we know there are those that are intrinsically motivated and those that need to be hyped up." This participant stated, "we encourage our scout team and younger players by naming a scout team MVP each week and do things like order pizza."

Participant C4 stated in overcoming player limitations they "start by identifying the variable or variables that may be causing the limitation, show the player, and come up with a plan to target those elements." Participant C4 also stated,

Motivation is key for much of our success as we coach players to understand the mental part of the game by breaking things down (ex. Being down 20 points is only 10 shots, not as huge of a mountain as it seems).

In reference back, survey support was found when surveying teachers in regards to their comfort and understanding of motivation. Survey results revealed that 100% of participants understand but struggle with consistent implementation. Coach survey

results, however, revealed that 100% of participants understand and implement

comfortably.

Document Analysis Data

A document analysis of pertinent planning documents was an additional way of

corroborating survey and interview data within this research to create a complete

triangular data analysis. Lesson plans were collected from teacher participants, and

practice plans were collected from coach participants. The documents were analyzed

using an analysis protocol (Appendix C) developed by me in collaboration with the

dissertation chair.

The document analysis protocol is a checkoff document that displays evidence of

inclusion of the following areas: whole group instruction, small group instruction, leveled

material/strategy for skill development, motivational activities, and whether additional

personnel were involved in planning.

Teacher Data From Document Analysis

All collected plans (4/4) from teachers revealed a plan of small group instruction

by skill. Document analysis of all teacher plans (4/4) revealed instructional delivery of

skills to the whole group with specifically planned small group skill instruction using

leveled material. Despite the strong survey and interview results regarding the

understanding and importance of motivation, there was no evidence in the plans

themselves of the integration of motivational strategies. In this analysis, the motivational

strategies and activities looked for were those of celebrations, recognitions, incentives,

encouragements, etc. Document analysis of teachers revealed 0% of the documents reveal

evidence of motivational activities. There was also no evidence of the use of additional

personnel.

Thus, the teacher document analysis revealed that 100% of the documents included evidence of whole group instruction, 100% included evidence of small group instruction, and 100% included evidence of leveled material/strategy for skill development. While those numbers are strong, 0% of the documents revealed evidence of motivational activities or evidence of additional personnel participating in the implementation.

Coach Data From Document Analysis

All collected plans (4/4) from coaches revealed a plan of small group practice by indicating the skill that would be coached and in what group. One plan even indicated which coach would instruct each group. This one plan was the only plan (1/4) that indicated the use of additional personnel. Document analysis of all coach plans (4/4) revealed instructional delivery and practice of select skills to the whole group. These plans also specifically group players for small group specialized skill instruction and practice. Noted here is evidence of leveled material/strategy in skill development work.

Despite the strong survey and interview results regarding the understanding and importance of motivation, there was no evidence in the plans themselves of the integration of motivational strategies. In this analysis, the motivational strategies and activities looked for were those of celebrations, recognitions, incentives, encouragements, etc. Document analysis of coaches revealed 0% of the documents reveal evidence of motivational activities.

Thus, the coach document analysis revealed that 100% of the documents included evidence of whole group instruction, 100% included evidence of small group instruction,

and 100% included evidence of leveled material/strategy for skill development. While those numbers are strong, 0% of the documents revealed evidence of motivational activities, and only 25% (one document) revealed evidence of additional personnel participating in the implementation.

Conclusion

Central Question: What Are Common Strategies Between Differentiated Instructional Practices and Effective Coaching Methodology?

Collectively, the survey results revealed that in all categories, there was a minimum understanding and implementation (even with struggles) of 75% between both teachers and coaches. No one category of any participant revealed a score of *little to no understanding.* This is a strong indicator that the participants collectively had a strong grasp of the prerequisite factors of data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/ coaching, and motivation. This strong understanding has a direct impact on the implementation of instruction using the differentiated instructional mindset. This also directly impacted the way in which the participants were able to answer the interview questions and design lesson/practice plans.

The series of interview questions were designed to collectively answer this central question. Identified in the answers of both teachers and coaches are common strategies for differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology. The most discussed common strategy between both groups of participants was that of initial whole group instruction/coaching with the spinoff of small groups for specific skill practice and scaffolding development based on performance data. This was evident in 100% of the

interviews. All interviews revealed evidence of weekly performance data analysis, the use of that data analysis to drive the next week, and differentiated instruction and delivery methods. Common pathways for effective instruction/coaching included knowing content, knowing students and players, and planning. Participant T4's quote summed up this similarity in stating, "You have to know your data and know your students to make sure you have all the components in place."

Additionally, all participants spoke to the importance of overcoming student/player limitations and factoring in motivation to the approach. Participant C4 stated in overcoming player limitations, they "start by identifying the variable or variables that may be causing the limitation, show the player, and come up with a plan to target those elements." Participant C1 stated, "Motivation is huge and coaches have to go in like we got this, we are going to win because the players feed off of that and they need to believe in you as the coach." Participant T4 stated, "I don't allow excuses and I let them know I'm here for them and I know they can do it even when it's hard."

The document analysis portion of the research collected plans from both teachers and coaches. The document protocol (Appendix C) analyzed evidences of whole group instruction, small group instruction, leveled material/strategy for skill development, motivational activities, and additional personnel involved in the implementation within each document.

The collected plans from teachers were analyzed using a document protocol, and 100% revealed a start of whole group instructional time followed by breakout small group instructional practice sessions. Likewise, all collected plans from coaches were analyzed, and 100% revealed a start of whole group practice followed by breakout small

group practice sessions.

Surprisingly, however, despite the survey and interview results regarding high regards to motivation, there was no evidence in the plans themselves of the integration of motivational strategies. Document analysis of teachers and coaches revealed 0% of the documents showed evidence of motivational activities in the sense of celebrations, recognitions, incentives, encouragements, etc.

Themes

Emerging themes from this research fell into two categories, major themes and minor themes. The major theme that emerged throughout the research with strong evidence within all data points was the use of initial whole group instruction/direction that was followed by small group breakout sessions. The idea of meeting students/players where they are and scaffolding was supported and mentioned by all eight participants. Within this emergent theme and throughout all, there was a focus on growth and individual skill development of both students and players.

Major Theme: Whole Group Evidence

Survey Evidence. The survey results collectively revealed that there was a 75% understanding of all categories, with no category of any participant revealing a score of *little to no understanding.* This is a strong indicator that the participants collectively had a strong grasp of the prerequisite factors of data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/coaching, and motivation. The strong results of the survey indicated that in answering the interview questions and designing lesson and practice plans, the participants were pulling from a strong understanding of these concepts.

The following survey results are evident to support the theme of whole group instruction. Survey results revealed that 50% of teachers understand and implement data collection comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Survey results revealed that 100% of teachers understand data analysis but struggle with implementation. Data-driven planning survey results revealed that 25% of teachers understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with implementation. Results for differentiated planning revealed that 50% of teachers understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Teacher surveys showed that data-driven instruction is supported, with 25% understanding and implementing comfortably and 75% understanding but struggling with implementation. Last, teacher surveys indicated that 25% understand and implement differentiate instruction comfortably and 75% understand but struggle with implementation. Of these survey category results that support the whole group theme, no category of any participant revealed a score of *little to no understanding.*

In addition to the teacher survey results, are those of the coach participants. The following survey results are evident to support the theme of whole group instruction. Survey results revealed that 75% of coaches understand and implement data collection comfortably, while 25% understand but struggle with implementation. Survey results revealed that 50% of coaches understand data analysis, but 50% understand while struggling with implementation. Data-driven planning survey results revealed that 75% of coaches understand and implement comfortably, while 25% understand but struggle with implementation. Results for differentiated planning revealed that 50% of coaches understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with

implementation. Coach surveys showed that data-driven instruction is supported, with 75% understanding and implementing comfortably and 25% understanding but struggling with implementation. Last, coach surveys indicated that 50% understand and implement differentiate instruction comfortably and 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Of these survey category results that support the whole group theme, no category of any participant revealed a score of *little to no understanding.*

Interview Evidence. Support for whole group instruction was articulated by both teachers and coaches. The interview results revealed that the most common strategy between both groups of participants was the use of initial whole group instruction/ coaching with a spinoff of small groups for specific skill practice and scaffolding development based on performance data.

Participant T1 stated, "All of my students get similar instructions and/or directions, but I often have to break the information down into manageable chunks." This participant also stated,

> It is particularly important to see if there is a particular part that the class is having trouble grasping a concept or if there are misconceptions that can be addressed in whole group instruction or in small group instructional sessions.

Participant T1 also stated, "you have to think about your particular students and what seems to work well with each one of them and what doesn't." Participant T3 explained, "We have to have our solid core instruction and if that is strong it will close some of the gaps." Participant T4 stated that following whole group, "when a student needs it a different way, it's best to bring them into small groups."

Participant C1 stated, "you have to know advanced players that can show up and

run with it, but then also those that aren't there yet that you have to spend a lot more time with." Participant C4 summed up this theme, stating,

> When instructing the whole team we use the same language simplifying as much as possible due to the diversity of academic levels among players, but during our individual skill development we have the chance to teach and guide them at their level.

Document Analysis Evidence. Evidence from document analysis was observed in support of whole group instruction. Document analysis showed that all eight participants revealed this in their lesson/practice plans. All eight documents reviewed from teachers and coaches had details of whole group time followed by a breakdown of how small groups would break out for specific skill practice and scaffolding. The results of the analysis revealed 100% (8/8) of the documents showed evidences of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and leveled material/strategy for skill development.

Major Theme: Small Group Evidence

Survey Evidence. The survey results collectively revealed that there was a 75% understanding of all categories, with no category of any participant revealing a score of *little to no understanding.* This is a strong indicator that the participants collectively had a strong grasp of the prerequisite factors of data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/coaching, and motivation. The strong results of the survey indicated that in answering the interview questions and designing lesson and practice plans, the participants were pulling from a strong understanding of these concepts.

The following survey results are evident to support the theme of small group

instruction. Survey results revealed that 50% of teachers understand and implement data collection comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Survey results revealed that 100% of teachers understand data analysis but struggle with implementation. Data-driven planning survey results revealed that 25% of teachers understand and implement comfortably, while 75% understand but struggle with implementation. Results for differentiated planning revealed that 50% of teachers understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Teacher surveys showed that data-driven instruction is supported, with 25% understanding and implementing comfortably and 75% understanding but struggling with implementation. Last, teacher surveys indicated that 25% understand and implement differentiate instruction comfortably and 75% understand but struggle with implementation. Of these survey category results that support the small group theme, no category of any participant revealed a score of *little to no understanding*.

In addition to the teacher survey results are those of the coach participants. The following survey results are evident to support the theme of small group instruction. Survey results revealed that 75% of coaches understand and implement data collection comfortably, while 25% understand but struggle with implementation. Survey results revealed that 50% of coaches understand data analysis, but 50% understand while struggling with implementation. Data-driven planning survey results revealed that 75% of coaches understand and implement comfortably, while 25% understand but struggle with implementation. Results for differentiated planning revealed that 50% of coaches understand and implement comfortably, while 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Coach surveys showed that data-driven instruction is supported with

75% understanding and implementing comfortably, 25% understanding but struggling with implementation. Last, coach surveys indicated that 50% understand and implement differentiate instruction comfortably and 50% understand but struggle with implementation. Of these survey category results that support the small group theme, no category of any participant revealed a score of *little to no understanding*.

Interview Evidence. Evidence of small group instruction was articulated by both teachers and coaches. The interview results revealed that the most common strategy between both groups of participants was the use of initial whole group instruction/ coaching with a spinoff of small groups for specific skill practice and scaffolding development based on performance data.

Participant T1 stated, "All of my students get similar instructions and/or directions, but I often have to break the information down into manageable chunks." Participant T2 stated, "Some students need more hands-on" and "small groups are based on their ability and where they are and what they need in order to grow." Participant T4 stated, "I'm going to teach all students on the same plan, but I know what each needs to be successful." Participant T4 stated, "when a student needs it a different way, it's best to bring them into small groups."

Participant C1 stated, "you have to know advanced players that can show up and run with it, but then also those that aren't there yet that you have to spend a lot more time with." This participant also stated, "some players can just be told what to do, some need to be shown, and some need a full walk-through." Participant C3 stated,

> Of course, we wouldn't coach every kid the same way as they are so different and
> we really want to make sure we know what the kids need as some need you to get

after them and others need a pat on the back.

Participant C4 summed up this theme, stating,

> When instructing the whole team we use the same language simplifying as much
> as possible due to the diversity of academic levels among players, but during our
> individual skill development we have the chance to teach and guide them at their
> level.

Document Analysis Evidence. Evidence from document analysis was observed in support of small group instruction. Document analysis showed that all eight participants revealed this in their lesson/practice plans. All eight documents reviewed from teachers and coaches had details of whole group time followed by a breakdown of how small groups would break out for specific skill practice and scaffolding. The results of the analysis revealed 100% (8/8) of the documents showed evidences of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and leveled material/strategy for skill development.

Minor Themes Evidence

Minor themes that emerged included, but were not limited to, the ideas of looking for outliers, reflection, and relationships. These themes emerged specifically from the interview data but were supported by elements of survey and document analysis results.

Survey Evidence. In addition to the survey evidence that supported the major themes of whole group and small group instruction, that same evidence discussed in previous sections also supports and connects to these minor themes. Survey results additionally revealed that 100% of teachers understand student motivation but struggle with implementation. Coach results showed that 100% of the participants understand and implement athlete motivation comfortably.

Interview Evidence. All four of the teacher participants discussed looking at the data to determine any students who just were not getting the information taught in order to work with them further, while two of the four coaches discussed identifying outliers in an effort to scaffold their ability or look for positions that better suited that individual's skill set. Reflection of practices was evident throughout the research in two of the four teachers and three of the four coaches, while one of the four teachers and all four coaches discussed in part the importance of building relationships within their answers. Though these themes emerged with somewhat smaller numbers, they strongly supported the "why" behind the major theme noted above.

Document Analysis Evidence. All collected plans from teachers and coaches were analyzed, and 100% revealed a start of whole group practice followed by breakout small group practice sessions. Surprisingly, however, despite the survey and interview results regarding high regards to motivation, there was no evidence in the plans themselves of the integration of motivational strategies. Document analysis of teachers and coaches revealed 0% of the documents showed evidence of motivational activities. Although there was no visible evidence of motivational activities in the document analysis, the evidence of small group instruction notes support of the minor theme of looking for outliers as the small groups are designed to work on specific skill scaffolding. Small group work was visibly evident in 100% (8/8) of the documents from both teachers and coaches.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this research was to develop a pathway to influence the implementation of differentiated instruction in elementary schools. Most notable may be the observation that coaches differentiate all the time. Team practice often involves small groups. Specialized coaches are assigned to their areas of expertise. Enigmatic to many is the ability of some athletic coaches to bring out the best in student athletes, and those same students may struggle in the classroom. The pathway to the expansion of differentiated instruction in the elementary classroom may be partially dependent upon the conclusion drawn from the observable parallels between the systemic approaches of athletic coaches and those of successful classroom teachers.

This study sought to answer the following central question: "What are common strategies between differentiated instructional practices and effective coaching methodology?" The obvious assertion is if it works on the field, it should work in the classroom. Dweck (2016) stated the following:

If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself, then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's unflattering. What's more, if you're oriented toward learning, as they are, you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. (p. 6)

Keeping the quote of Dweck in mind, this study may now influence the mindset of educators. In accepting and embracing an understanding of the current abilities of students, teachers can adopt effective measures, like those of coaches that support

effective learning using the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction.

The figure depicts the comparative analysis diagram used for drawing **a** conclusion when analyzing the survey responses, interview question responses, and document analysis components. The figure provides a visual diagram to compare the teacher responses to the coach responses and then determine commonalities between the two. This allowed for comparisons and also a contrast of responses.

Figure

Data Collection Method: Survey/Interview/Document Review
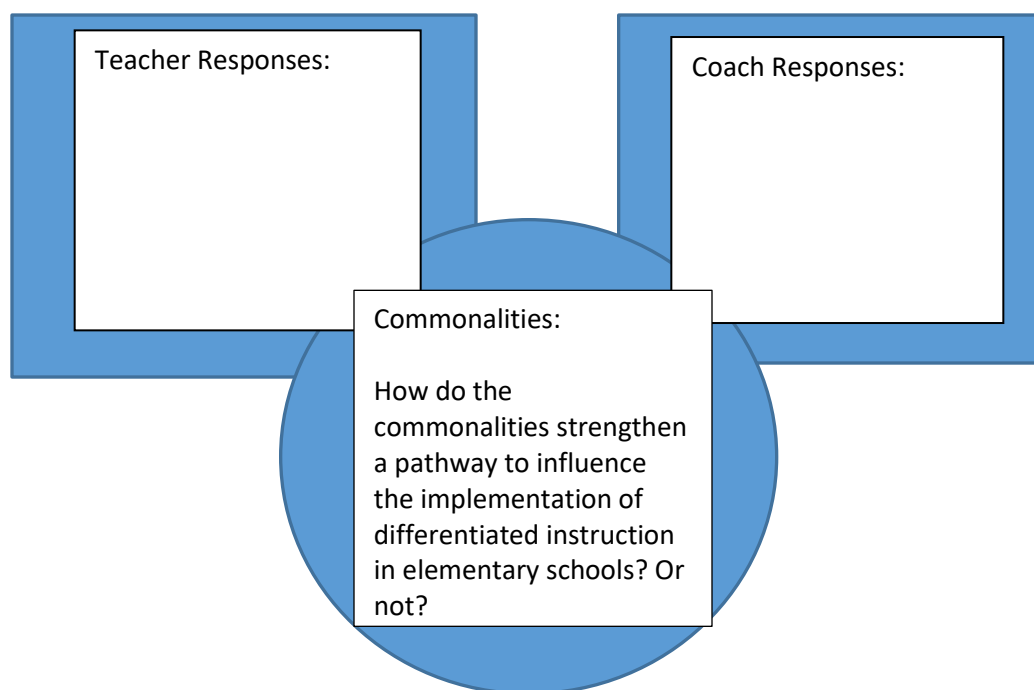
Introduction

The conceptual framework of this qualitative study on the differentiated instructional philosophy is grounded in the beliefs of UDL. UDL focuses on the "why," "what," and "how" of learning (CAST, 2020). In education, differentiated instruction is a philosophical model for teachers to customize each student's learning path that facilitates

learning in the way that works best for each student. To do this successfully, teachers

must understand that with differentiated instruction, the learning goals are the same, but

the path and the methods used differ in achieving those goals. Differentiation in

classroom practices recognizes the notion that children differ, and the most effective

teachers do whatever it takes to engage the whole range of students in learning at all

levels (Tomlinson, 2001). Additionally, there should be no confusion or misconception

that differentiated instruction is the same as modifications and accommodations

necessary in the support of special education and exceptional needs of students.

Differentiated instruction is a mindset for all; and though it incorporates the needs of

special education and exceptional children, it is a mindset to meet all students where they

are. It is not just for students with IEPs. The intent of this dissertation was not to confuse

the two but to explain how the philosophical approach of differentiated instruction

supports all students and all needs (both identified and not identified).

The general approach to carrying out this study was to conduct interviews,

surveys, and document analysis to explore the parallels between the planning styles of

athletic coaches and elementary classroom reading teachers utilizing differentiated

instructional approaches. The design of the study was an analysis of information

collected by conducting face-to-face (virtual) interviews, electronic surveys, and

document analysis of plans to show the parallels between the two planning and

implementation approaches. The research plan conducted an interview, collected

electronic surveys, and conducted a document analysis of randomly selected plans of the

successful athletic coaches and successful K-3 classroom teachers regarding their

planning for differentiated instruction and implementation styles including differentiated

instruction. Data were compared to determine parallels and evidence of differentiated instruction concepts.

Findings

Survey Summary

Whereas the conclusions of this survey showed that more than half of the elementary teachers and coaches understand data for differentiation purposes, still a substantial number of teachers (and coaches) struggle with consistent implementation of data collection. All teacher respondents and most of the coach respondents revealed that they are, however, comfortable with data analysis. Whereas teachers are 100% comfortable with data analysis, coach responses were somewhat different. Considering the success many coaches have with slower learners, it is reasonable to question whether data analysis alone is as essential to student success as other critical variables implemented by coaches. For example, one coach (C1) stated that some advanced players can follow information, whereas others struggle. This coach explained that there are physical and intellectual differences in players that require different approaches. This indicated that one must know the whole child and go beyond the numbers.

Third, data-driven planning proved to be a deficit for teachers as the majority of teachers struggle with consistent implementation. Further, the findings showed that a major strength of coaches is the use of data in planning. Ironically, although teachers are partially strong in the understanding of data and totally strong in data analysis, they fail the test in the area of data-driven planning. This factor alone may account for the perceived differences in the success of coaches with specific groups versus the success of teachers with that same group. Coaches understand they must not only study the data

from the previous games but also use what they learn from the data to plan for future

success or wins.

Quite the contrary, when both groups were asked about differentiating planning

based on the data, half of each respondent group articulated comfortability, whereas half

did not. Although only half of the coaches rated differentiated planning as a strength with

complete comfort, the interview data, as well as the document analysis data, showed that

coaches were more apt to include a variety of differentiated activities in their planning.

For example, the coaching practice plans include a complete breakdown of differentiated

groups based on need and performance and how those groups will run. This accounted

for the majority of the plan, whereas teacher lesson plans only included a very small

amount of time allotted to differentiated instruction. This is mainly due to the time

requirements and restraints on the instructional day that teachers are mandated to follow.

Coaches on the other hand are offered full flexibility to design their practice time

completely as needed. The conclusion here is that the pathway for full implementation of

differentiation in the classroom is strained and will remain strained until differentiated

planning is a strength and priority of elementary teachers and is supported by leaders.

The survey data also proved that the coaches were more adept and comfortable in

data-driven instruction/coaching than the elementary teachers. Three fourths of the

teachers revealed their struggle with data-driven instruction. Additionally, the teachers

showed the same level of deficiency in differentiated instruction. Notably, only half of

the coaches shared that they were skilled in differentiated instruction/coaching. It is not

an over-reach to conjecture that many school districts in this country have spent years

attempting to develop teacher proficiency data-driven instruction and differentiated

instruction, but the need for additional training in both areas is strongly illuminated in the findings of this study.

Advocates for student athletes may argue that motivation is the golden ticket to success. While it is hard to measure motivation in the classroom, and all the teacher respondents revealed that they struggle with consistent implementation of student motivation, the coaches believe they understand it and implement motivational strategies with ease. I believe motivation has to play a major role in student success. For example, one coach (C4) explained the importance of "identifying the variable or variables that may be causing the limitation, show the player, and come up with a plan to target those elements." This coach went on to say, "motivation is key for much of our success." Whatever coaches know and understand regarding student motivation may have merit for teachers. Perhaps teachers should seek out coaches and begin a dialog. Regardless of the adult's understanding of and use of data to differentiate instruction, if there are no takers due to a lack of motivation, the pathway to differentiation is blocked.

In conclusion, the survey was designed to support the research questions by determining and gauging the level of comfort of the participants in the areas of data collection, data analysis, data-driven planning, differentiated planning, data-driven instruction/coaching, differentiated instruction/coaching, and motivation. The above components of the survey are believed to be crucial prerequisites to fully practicing differentiated instruction of any kind.

Interview Summary

Through a series of interview questions, respondents were asked to define and articulate effective differentiated teaching/coaching. The interview results revealed that

the most discussed common strategy between both groups of participants was that of initial whole group instruction/coaching with the spinoff of small groups for specific skill practice and scaffolding based on performance data. This was evident in 100% of the interviews; however, there were major discrepancies in the approach. The teacher interviews strongly focused on the initial whole group instruction as a strong priority. For example, one teacher (T4) stated, "that is the core instruction." The spin-off of small groups came to break down information as needed. The responses lend to the notion that the differentiation of instruction in small groups is secondary. The coaches on the other hand responded that there is an effort to begin with whole group direction, but as one coach (C1) stated, "you might be able to because you have advanced players and some that try but are not able to follow." Another coach (C2) noted that the startup is the same, but it is how they individualize so they have successful practices. The coaches' responses lend to the notion that getting to the differentiated groups is the primary goal for instructional delivery. Though there are similarities in how the respondents defined differentiated teaching/coaching, there was a clear difference in how the implementation of the defined components were weighted. This is potentially a clear factor that can be referenced by school leaders to better prioritize the mandates and restraints on classroom instruction. This supports the idea of more flexibility for differentiated instruction in the classroom as coaches have on the practice field.

Additionally, the interview questions revealed evidence of weekly performance data analysis, the use of that data analysis to drive the next week, and differentiated instruction and delivery methods. Thus, a common pathway for effective instruction/ coaching is knowing content, knowing students and players, and planning; there were

again variations in how these components emerged as priorities. Teacher responses reveal that the use of data analysis for differentiated instructional practices comes from how students performed on skills during whole group instruction. Student performance is analyzed to determine who needs additional support. One teacher (T2) stated, "the data is used to determine struggle skill areas" and "who needs to be pulled and worked with for additional support going forward." Again, this is stated as a secondary response. This was the common response among the teacher participants. Coach responses, on the contrary, revealed the idea that the initial whole group session was more of an initial meeting. On the game field, it is the specialized groups where the core practice takes place to scaffold the skills necessary for success. So again, as stated previously, though there are similarities in the approaches, there are clear differences in the prioritization and purposes of those approaches. This mindset difference, with intentional and clear professional development, can influence school leaders and teachers to better implement differentiated practices with a better prioritization. As noted in the literature review of this work, Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) supported that differentiated instruction is not something a district or school leaders can simply tell or show teachers how to do; instead, it is a process of one rethinking their classroom practices from an ongoing process of trial, reflection, and adjustments made within the classroom itself. Tomlinson and Imbeau went on to clarify that differentiation is not something a teacher does or does not do; instead, it is the way teachers pay attention to student variations and responses and then respond in some way by proactively planning instruction to consistently address student differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile.

 In conjunction with the consensus of beginning instruction with whole group

followed by small group, all participants included the importance of overcoming

student/player limitations. In overcoming limitations, there has to be an understanding

that accommodations and modifications differ. In the literature review, these terms were

defined and provide clarity in how we conclude this research to plan accordingly.

Accommodations are changes in how a student learns material (Understood for All, Inc.,

2020). Modifications are changes in what a student is taught or expected to learn

(Understood for All, Inc., 2020). Though with a different prioritization mindset, the

research revealed that through all data analysis, 100% of all participants started

instruction/coaching using whole group but then broke off into small group skill

development and scaffolding. Understanding the role and use of accommodations versus

modifications is crucial in planning accordingly to overcome student limitations and

ultimately motivating performance.

Motivation was also mentioned by all participants as a factor in overcoming

limitations. Previously, motivation was defined in the literature review as an act or

process of giving someone a reason for doing something, the act or process of

motivating someone, the condition of being eager to act or work, the condition of being

motivated, and a force or influence that causes someone to do something (Merriam-

Webster, n.d.b). Souders (2021) explained that understanding motivation gives us insight

into human nature and explains why we set goals; strive for achievement and power;

desire relationships; and experience emotions like fear, anger, and compassion.

Specifically, in this study, the focus looked for motivational evidences in the sense of

celebrations, recognitions, incentives, encouragements, etc. Participant C3 stated, "we

know there are those that are intrinsically motivated and those that need to be hyped up."

This type of understanding additionally supports the efforts to differentiate for students/players accordingly, in an effort to maximize their growth.

Document Analysis Summary

In collaboration with professors and to triangulate this research, the decision was made to include a document analysis to create a complete triangular data analysis in support of the research questions. Lesson plans were collected from select teachers, and practice plans were collected from select coaches. These documents were analyzed using a protocol developed by the researcher. The intent was to look for similarities and evidence of differentiated instruction both in the classroom and in the athletic arena.

This analysis revealed that collectively, 100% of the documents illuminated whole group instruction followed by a spinoff of small group skill development. There were also noticeable discrepancies in the time allotted for that small group instruction. Where teacher plans represented only 20- to 30-minute time frames for small group instruction, coaching plans had no time restrictions. Practice schedules represented a 2-hour time frame (with recent limitations to 1½ hours due to COVID guidelines). Regardless, the practice time frames were at the full discretion of the coaches, whereas teacher schedules are dictated by district requirements for instructional minutes. This glaring difference indicates more flexibility in the implementation options of coaches versus teachers. This raises the question of whether or not teachers would benefit from more flexibility in daily instructional minutes.

Overcoming student limitations and implementing motivation were equally discussed and represented as evident in the practices of all teachers and coaches in the interview data. Despite the survey and interview findings of motivational practices and

analysis to determine the right kind of motivation needed in 100% of all responses, there was no representation of such celebratory strategies in the plans that were submitted for review. This raises the question of whether or not the paper aligns with reality.

Connections and Recommendations

It is important to connect the fact that UDL focuses on the "why," "what," and "how" of learning (CAST, 2020) to what this research revealed. The parallels between the psychology and practice behind athletic coaching and within the elementary reading classroom show that the implementation of differentiated instruction is crucial and strong in both arenas. Ultimately, this research revealed that the teachers and coaches within this study have a strong grasp on data analysis, whole group instruction, and small group differentiated instruction. Both groups show evidence of focusing on the end goals, both short-term and long-term. With that being said, there are also strong indicators that coaches prioritize the methods differently and sometimes have fresher data, more time for differentiated instruction, and more personnel support affecting the "why," "what," and "how" UDL supports. Taking this notable angle, future research could focus on frequency of data, time availability for differentiated instruction, and material and personnel availability support between both groups which ultimately supports the "why," "what," and "how" of implementation. Suggested future research additionally noted specifically from this study would include but not be limited to a study of the role of motivation. The lack of evidence of motivational activities in the plans themselves within this study reveals a disconnect.

Overall, the findings of this comparison revealed a strong parallel between the instructional practices in the K-3 reading classroom and the coaching practices of high

school athletic coaches. These findings provided evidence of the use of differentiated instruction supported by the UDL components in both fields of practice by those deemed successful in their respective area, therefore supporting this method produces success in the classroom and on the ball fields. The strongest parallel between both groups was that of instructionally and directionally starting with whole group instruction and direction and then breaking into small group skill development and scaffolding groups with a differentiated instructional approach. The strongest discrepancy ironically is within the prioritization of that very same parallel. These points were undeniably evident in 100% of all data points. With the participants all being deemed successful in their respective areas, this shows a correlation between strong differentiated instructional practices with the success found within these classrooms and programs. The discrepancies within this correlation, however, raise the idea of better prioritizing the purpose behind the strategies in the classroom to better produce champions in both arenas.

The implications of this comparison revealed strength in coaching methodology. We see throughout that the coach participants seemed to have this concept ingrained more organically, possibly due to the lack of time restrictions. Participant C1 stated that if "administrators want better data-driven instruction in the classroom, they need to hire more coaches to teach." Although the teacher participants in this study strongly parallel the approach with strategies and concepts, this comparison reveals a prioritization difference and indicates that the coaching model is a strong model to follow for classroom teachers. The question is why are there differences and what are they?

Major differences noted included time flexibility and additional expert personnel. Plans revealed evidence that coaches' plans have more time flexibility for small group

skill instruction, whereas teacher instructional time is set and often mandated by the district. Teachers in this study are all held to a strict instructional minute schedule set by their respected districts based on set state requirements. Additionally, coaches noted in the interviews and within practice plans the use of additional expert personnel for small group skill instruction. Teachers, in contrast, are expected to be experts in all areas of reading development, as additional expert personnel is not available. These differences could account for the prioritization difference noted in previous chapters. To accomplish success in both areas, do we not need to level the playing field? Evidence shows that differentiated instruction is strong and prevalent in both areas but prioritized differently; therefore, providing teachers with the same time, funding, and personnel flexibility for implementation could support higher success rates. Recommendations would be for school leaders to really look at the causes for this prioritization difference to level the playing field.

Just as we see on the athletic fields and courts, when differentiated instruction grounded in the UDL model is evident in the classrooms, student performance growth is maximized. The coach participants in this research were all deemed as successful for producing successful programs in their respective sport, while the teacher participants were all deemed as producing successful student growth in the K-3 reading classroom. The findings revealed such a strong parallel of the participants' differentiated instructional practices that it is only reasonable to assume an increase in teacher effectiveness given the same support as coaches. This equalized support for teachers could create that shift in priority of differentiated instruction in small groups that the coaches already have in place. The evidences in both fields suggests support that

differentiated practices drive success.

If we are going to win in the classroom as we do on the playing fields, decision makers may consider equalization for teachers in time, resources, and personnel flexibility. The whole philosophy of differentiated instruction should be critiqued within districts school-by-school to equal the playing field with teachers and coaches. Additional funding for professional development and ongoing professional learning community opportunities is suggested to be included as a priority. We cannot expect teachers to produce like coaches until the playing field is equal. Although this study revealed the practices are in place and are effective, we see the disconnect and discrepancies teachers face in getting the job done. In addition to the coaching world having more flexibility in time, resources, and personnel, we also know that additional pay and celebrations come with coaching. Again, this all would need to be analyzed and considered in a district-wide school-by-school analysis of differentiated instructional implementation.

Recommendations for this study include sharing the findings through publication. This comparison allows for a piece of grounded research supporting the educational philosophical approach of differentiated instruction. It is recommended that school leaders use this analysis to further analyze district mandates on instructional structures in efforts to better align priority to differentiated instruction within the classrooms. Further recommendations would be to use this research for professional development work for school leaders and teachers at all experience levels. This could provide an avenue to better understand the concept of differentiated instruction from the coaching perspective and how bettering the implementation in the classrooms can benefit students. Understanding the parallels and discrepancies of this comparison can have a positive

impact on student performance.

Future Research

  A repeat study of the comparison of coaching methodology to other content areas and other grade levels is needed with a newly added focus on how prioritization of strategies within differentiated instruction factors into practices in each area. It is suggested to include a focus on whether differentiated small group instruction is a primary or secondary focus. This would allow for further evidence of the differentiated strategies in other content areas and other grade levels to determine a correlation of the practice and the priority to successful performance data. In conjunction with repeat studies and as stated previously, future research could incorporate the focus on frequency of data, time availability for differentiated instruction, and material and personnel availability support between both groups. It also was suggested that in a repeat study, it could provide an additional data point if the participants were focused with a cross reference of personal experience. For example, selecting teachers with an athletic/coaching background and teachers and coaches who had been struggling reading students in elementary school. This cross-referenced focus could gather more data on the influence and benefits of the usage of differentiated instruction.

  Within future research, as additionally noted specifically from this study, an exploration of motivation's role could be included. The lack of evidence of motivational activities in the plans within this study reveals a disconnect that could be further explored.

  Additionally, future research of growth versus proficiency with the implementation of differentiated instruction would provide additional support to the

effectiveness of the differentiated philosophical approach. Long-term research on the

sustainability of the effects of differentiated instruction over time from elementary to

high school and the growth and proficiency that accompany it could bring all of this

together for maximum evidence of effectiveness.

Reading instruction programs are adopted and purchased by districts every few

years. Many of these programs embed what is referred to as small group, differentiated

instruction and/or enrichment/intervention instructional components. Future research

could focus on the analyses of the differentiated instructional sections that are embedded

within programs. This would help school leaders decipher the effective use of

differentiated practices. This research would need to be designed with program

evaluations and comparisons of design to help determine effectiveness.

Conclusion

Anderson (2007) said that differentiated instruction is regarded as an effective

teaching tool to meet the diverse academic needs of learners. Differentiated instruction is

not a single strategy, but rather an approach to instruction that incorporates and

implements a variety of strategies (Hall et al., 2003).

To conclude this research, it has been determined that the comparison between

differentiated instruction in the K-3 reading classroom and that of high school athletic

coaching methodology is strong. The practices and implementations of K-3 reading

teachers and successful high school athletic coaches are undeniably similar with almost

identical parallels in the practices. We have learned that with a focus on aligning

prioritization within these parallels, school leaders have the opportunity to shed new light

on differentiated instruction, grounded in the UDL model, to better promote and foster

student success in the classrooms. This research opens a door for new conversations and to view differentiated instruction through a new lens.

It is within a truly differentiated classroom that the differences and variances of the learners are embraced, and learning is increased by responsive teaching (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998). With the research results of such an unlikely pairing of the teaching and coaching worlds, differentiated instruction now has a grounded comparison to solidify and validate the benefits of the practice within the elementary reading classroom just as seen on the high school athletic fields.

Differentiation in classroom practices recognizes the notion that children differ, and the most effective teachers do whatever it takes to engage the whole range of students in learning at all levels (Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson (2014) said, "A great coach never achieves greatness for himself or his team by working to make all his players alike" (p. 22).

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Answers will be collected via audio recording and transcribed.

1. How do you analyze weekly performance data?

2. What do you look for in this analysis—patterns, strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, avenues for success?

3. How do the findings from this data analysis assist and/or influence your plans for the upcoming week?

4. What are the differences in the way you teach/coach all students/players?

5. How do you differentiate the way you teach/coach all students/players?

6. What steps would you recommend as important pathways to differentiated instruction/coaching?

7. How do you define effective planning for effective differentiated teaching/coaching?

8. How do you overcome student/player limitations?

9. How does motivation factor into your approach/plans?

10. Do you implement motivational activities? Explain.

Appendix B

Survey

Survey

Answers will be compared to determine and support patterns.

Circle 1-3 to determine your comfort/understanding of each item.

1-Little to No Understanding

2-Understand (but struggle with consistent implementation)

3-Understand and Implement Comfortable

Data Collection	1	2	3
Data Analysis (Determining Patterns)	1	2	3
Data Driven Planning	1	2	3
Differentiated Planning	1	2	3
Data Driving Instruction/Coaching	1	2	3
Differentiated Instruction/Coaching	1	2	3
Motivation	1	2	3

Appendix C

Document Analysis Protocol

Document Analysis Protocol:

Document

__T1   __T2   __T3   __T4
__C1   __C2   __C3   __C4

Evidences	Y/N	Notes about Evidence
Evidence of Whole Group instruction		
Evidence of Small Group Instruction		
Evidence of Leveled materials/Strategies for Skill Development		
Evidence of Motivational strategies		
Evidence of Additional Personnel Involved in Implementations		