ED 632 Heacox Review

As I read the text for this class, and listed/watched the summary videos presented early on in the course, I began to dog ear certain pages and highlight paragraphs of interest. I viewed this text through the lens of an incoming first year principal searching for ways to help my teaching staff further or better embrace differentiation. In my estimation, based upon my rudimentary book marks, the most important points related to differentiated instruction in the Heacox (20020 book, *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom,* are as follows:

"You May Be Differentiating Already" (pg. 7)

There seems to be an automatic response with some, usually tenured, teachers to push back on any new educational initiatives. Even when "new" means *in this millennium*. It is therefore important, as a newly hired administrator, to focus on what those seasoned teachers are already doing with regard to differentiated instruction. Perhaps they are already, as Heacox suggests, "providing variety and challenge in learning, identifying who among [their] students is best served by [their] current plans, and modifying those plans as needed so more students can be successful learners."

"What Do We Differentiate?" (pg. 10)

Here again, we can search for the least "scary" way for teachers to implement differentiation in their classroom. Perhaps a particular teacher cringes at the thought of deviating from the teacher-centric model of instruction that has always worked for her. But maybe she'd

be more willing to introduce differentiation in the form of the "product" she would accept as demonstration that students had mastered a specific concept.

"Discovering Your Students" (pg. 21)

The tools presented in chapter two are an amazing way for teachers to get to know their students early on in the school year. I would highly encourage my future staff to do a similar activity with new classes of students. In fact, I used the "Interest Inventory" found on pages 29-31 several time in the past five years at the beginning of a new course. That first day when we go over the syllabus and class rules, is a perfect opportunity to ask the students to think critically about their interests and how they learn. And it's important to let them know that you will try to use their responses to guide the kinds of learning experiences in the upcoming class. I think students found it refreshing on day one to learn that the entire semester was not already set in stone; that they had a say in the path the class took; that I was willing to adjust the class to meet their needs AND the state standards.

"Students rightfully resent being asked to take a challenge when it's clear to them that all it means is more work" (pg. 67).

And therein lies the rub. Not just for students but teachers too think differentiation and challenge means more work for each of them. And when it is couched in those terms, finding new ways to further challenge exceptional students, does sound like more work for the student and teacher. But I have found some success in focusing on or leveraging a student's learning strengths to produce more challenging products. As Heacox reminds us, when talking about

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, "Students learn and produce with greater ease when they're using an area of strength" (pg. 70). So piling more of the same type of work onto a student who has already demonstrated acquisition of a learning objective IS more work for both the student and teacher. But allowing a student to further demonstrate mastery of an objective through their own unique learning strength and perspective means both parties get an opportunity to look at that particular standard or benchmark from a new point of view. And as such, it may seem much less like more work.

Six Ways to Structure Tiered Assignments" (pg. 91)

The six ways cited by Heacox offer a handful of approaches teachers can use to setting up tiering in their classroom. It's a more organized and purposeful take on the "Think-Pair-Share" concepts taught in my teacher candidate courses two decades ago and it's a long way from the "number off 1-4" strategy used by my teachers before that. Taking time to think about the audience and then design tiered assignments, whether based on challenge level, complexity, resources, outcome, process, or product, allows teachers to set the essential questions that inform their curriculum as the ultimate destination but offer a variety of paths for students to get there throughout the course.

"Offering choices is an important way to motivate students and get them interested in a project" (pg. 101).

Getting students to accept some responsibility for their own path toward answering the essential questions posed by a particular course goes a long way toward overall student

achievement. If a student is invested in the process they'll likely be more interested in the product. I used to begin my World History classes by hosting a textbook review. Students, in small groups, dug through the 36 chapters of our huge world history text and were asked to come up with three chapters that they thought could best answer the handful of essential questions I had posed in the course syllabus. The students basically chose which chapters we'd cover as a class in an attempt to meet state standards while battling what Grant Wiggins (1989) calls, "The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance."

Speaking about the futility of trying to teach everything, I have probably exhausted my ability to summarize key points of a textbook that I found to be insightful throughout. I've seen the Heacox book on many office bookshelves in many schools, and like you said when you introduced this course, until a better text on differentiation presents itself we'll continue to use it as a go-to reference.

Heacox, Diane. (2002) *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners, Grades 3-12* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing

Wiggins, G. (1989). The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance. *Educational Leadership*, *47*(3).