

Introduction

As the new school year begins I look over the computer lab anxiously awaiting the students' arrival. The bell rings and the students begin to file in. I do not interfere with the seating arrangements and I watch as the usual patterns begin to occur, girls sit by girls and the boys rough house and joke around with each other until the final bell rings and then find a seat. The energy and excitement of the first day is upon us. The students are already asking, "Can we turn on the computers? May I get on the Internet? What are we doing today?" It is hard to believe how excited they are over the use of computers every year regardless of which class it is, animation, photography, graphics, etc.

But as the school year moves on some students seem to become distracted, unmotivated, and disconnected to the class material yet others are continuously challenged and motivated by the course content. As I look around I have come to the realization that various types of groups tend to form as a result of this:

I'm here because I have to be not because I want to; my schedule forced me into this class:

"Why do I have to do this? What does this mean to me? When will I need this again? Do I have to?"

The non-technological student, always in need of reassurance:

The computer hates me! I will never be able to do this; I'm not smart enough! Help, Help!

All in moderation student do just as much as I have but when I feel like it:

"I'll get it done by the due date, no worries Miss B. What exactly do I need to get an A? Is this enough?"

The advanced media student, I get everything done in a big hurry:

“This is boring, what can I do next? You’re not finished yet, don’t you get it? I already know how to do this! Can I work on other assignments/go to the library?”

Technological superstar picks up and executes new things with ease:

“What else can you show me? Have you ever heard of this? Check this out Miss B? Can I come at lunch and work?”

The classes and student interests, cultures, backgrounds, etc. vary from year to year, but one main trend has stayed the same, a variety of technological levels and learning styles in the classroom. The challenge of serving so many students’ needs is continually progressing, especially with the increase of technology use outside of school. It seems nearly impossible to individualize instruction for so many students and to keep them all equally motivated in such a diverse environment.

I have used various teaching strategies, created an array of assignments over the years hoping to motivate and interest more students, tried to adapt to students learning styles, and also keep up with emerging technological advances. Although these processes have kept my classes flowing and students learning to a point there seems to be much more to do to increase students’ motivation. I want the students to ultimately see themselves as effective creators and problem solvers of multimedia. Therefore I feel they need intrinsic motivation and challenge to reach this goal.

The school year is now coming to an end and as I sit back for a brief moment and these reoccurring thoughts submerge:

- How many students were left behind or felt left out?
- Why was one project more motivating to the students than the others?

- What would have kept them further intrigued with other assignments?
- What can I do next year to further engage more learners (there are so many levels in one typical classroom)?
- How do I make the curriculum design and delivery more captivating to all students?

So many questions but where do the answers reside? This brings me to my research question I would like to further investigate, “*What Happens When I use Differentiation Strategies to Design Multimedia Projects?*”

I would like to study this research question through student surveys, newly developed projects involving differentiation, analyzing student feedback, collecting student artifacts, journaling activities, taping classroom interaction, and field observations.