Differentiation and Personalized Learning the Easy Way

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Differentiation and personalized learning are probably the biggest educational change proposed during the past decade. Educators have finally come to realize that the one-size-for-all curriculum fails to develop the strengths and talents of all students; and that too much of schooling still revolves upon a "drill-and-kill" curriculum that is mainly intended to improve scores on teacher-made or standardized achievement tests. What also became apparent is that teachers simply do not have the time to make the individual adjustments necessary to personalize learning and make learning both enjoyable and engaging for any individual students.

We learned through years of experience that other strength-based factors such as enjoyment, engagement, interests, preferred ways of learning, executive function skills, and preferred ways of expressing oneself are as important (and maybe even be more important than test scores) for determining the effectiveness of the learning process. This interest in what we call assessment *for* learning as opposed to traditional test that assess what students already have learned. This interest became the focus of a series of developing student-completed rating scales that assess these factors (Renzulli, 2021). The problem, however, is that these scales created a mountain of paperwork that teachers needed to interpret and act upon information resulting from these instruments.

Another big change in learning that has occurred in recent years is the advent of using technology to facilitate the learning process. We therefore conducted a research study (Summary below) on a technology-based program that allows students to complete the above-mentioned factors on their computers (Renzulli & Reis, 2007; Field, 2009).

This process results in an individual profile of each student's strengths. This development and research led to the creation of a remarkable computer program that analyzes each student's profile and selects resources from a data base of approximately 50,000 curricular enrichment resources and the program sends students relevant resources based on their profile. Teachers can also use this data base by entering curricular topics to find enrichment resources for topics of their choice. Information about this data base can be found at https://renzullilearning.com .

Summary of Research

In the experimental study, quantitative procedures were used to investigate the use of Renzulli Learning on oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, science achievement, social studies achievement of 383 elementary and middle schools students. The research took place in two schools, an urban middle school in Georgia where half of all students are considered to be at risk due to poverty or other factors, and a suburban elementary school in southern California. Students in grades 3–5 (n = 185) and grades 6–8 (n = 198) were randomly assigned to use Renzulli Learning for 2–3 hours each week for a 16-week period. Students in the treatment groups were compared to students who did not have the opportunity to use Renzulli Learning in

control classes in the same schools. A two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used to explore differences between treatment and control students. After 16 weeks, students who participated in Renzulli Learning demonstrated significantly higher growth in reading comprehension ($p < .001$), significantly higher growth in oral reading fluency ($p = .016$), and significantly higher growth in social studies achievement ($p = .013$) than those students who did not participate in Renzulli Learning.

Additional research can be found at:
https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/2lafrsey25yqolfgiv16a/J.-Newman-copy.pdf?rlkey=mjkfhv5inokjdt5zplicoh541&dl=0

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