THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES
ON NON-TRADITIONAL, ADULT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN
A BACCALAUREATE NURSING COMPLETION PROGRAM (RN-BSN) COURSE
FOR REGISTERED NURSES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

KAREN A. HIRSCH

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. ROY A. WEAVER

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2013
ABSTRACT

DISSEPTION PROJECT: The Impact of Differentiated Instructional Techniques on Non-Traditional, Adult Student Engagement in a Baccalaureate Nursing Completion Program for Registered Nurses (RN-BSN) Course

STUDENT: Karen A. Hirsch

DEGREE: Doctor of Education

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: MAY, 2013

PAGES: 216

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of differentiated instructional techniques on non-traditional, adult student engagement in an RN-BSN completion program course. Differentiated instructional techniques have been a staple method of teaching in K-12 education for a number of years. Differentiated instruction (DI) is a means of teaching students by considering learning preferences and by offering options for meeting course requirements. Non-traditional, adult learners have varied life experiences as well as learning needs. This study addressed how and why engagement of the adult learner in a nursing course was affected by using common differentiated instructional techniques such as model-building, tiered assignment, and literature circles.

The study was conducted using case study method. A purposeful sample of non-traditional, adult learners enrolled in an RN-BSN health promotion nursing course was taken. Data were collected via participant observation and field notes, faculty interview, participant journals, open-ended questionnaires, researcher notes, and focus group
transcript. Tiered assignments (blog and family assessment) and literature circle postings were also reviewed. Thematic content analysis (TCA) was employed for data analysis.

Five major themes emerged from the data: valuing the student, framing, learning environment, non-traditional teaching techniques, and behaviors of engagement. Each major theme was composed of several subthemes. Subthemes associated with valuing the student, included personhood, voice of the student, self-awareness, choice, and skills related to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. The second theme of framing was connected with the subthemes of making meaning and context. The third theme of learning environment entailed subthemes of safety, freedom, structure, and forced engagement. The fourth theme of non-traditional teaching techniques included “Out-of-the-box” thinking, control over learning, and self-directed learning. The final theme of behaviors of engagement was comprised of subthemes of enjoyment, ownership, accountability, motivation, and creativity.

Findings of the study indicated that each of the differentiated instructional techniques had a positive impact on student engagement. The subthemes served to identify specific aspects of the DI techniques that were found to be most beneficial for the non-traditional, adult learner.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey of transformation would not be complete without the assistance of many individuals. During the past five years, I have been very fortunate to have a support team to keep me headed in the direction of success. Without the contributions from all the members of my team, I would not have met my goal.

First, I would like to thank members of my immediate family. To my father, who supported me from my very first doctoral class and now stands proud of me from his home in heaven, I say: Daddy, your prayers and advice kept me in pursuit of what seemed like the impossible dream. To my mother, who still encourages me to learn all that I can, I have appreciated your support and interest in my work that became the energy I needed to finish my degree. To my sister, Janet, and her husband, Gary, I give my heartfelt thanks for being there and doing the majority of the work for the family and the family farm, so that I could devote time to my studies. To my niece and nephew, Bethany and Zachary, I have appreciated your understanding when Aunt Karen could not be around as much due to assignments and research necessary to survive academia. Both of you helped make this degree possible.

My success is largely due to Dr. Roy Weaver. Thank you for your infinite patience, your wisdom, and your support and encouragement throughout the dissertation process. I would not have been able to do this without your guidance. To the rest of my committee, Dr. Shelly Glowacki-Dudka, Dr. Kevin Smith, and Dr. Marilyn Ryan, each of you have contributed your advice, expertise, and your valuable time to see me through to the completion of my degree. My gratitude and appreciation for all members of the
dissertation committee is beyond words. Additional appreciation goes to Dr. Cheryll Adams who shared her expertise in differentiated instruction with me. Please know that your support has helped me grow as an individual, and I will never forget your kindness.

My friends have been a wonderful light at the end of the tunnel for me. Sara Shierling, my classmate who befriended me from the first doctoral class that we had together, has always been a joy and kindred spirit that made this endeavor a lot of fun. Thanks for the memories and your friendship. It was just the inspiration that I needed to survive the 12-credit-hour semesters. My appreciation goes out to my personal friends: Joanne Wisehart, Ann Wolski, and Shelly McClanahan. Your interest in my education for the past five years spurred me on to finish my journey.

To my colleagues, I thank you for all of the time that you spent listening to me talk about all things doctorate. To Connie Wilson, Linda Rodebaugh, Margie Porter, Cheryl Martin, and Anne Thomas, and many others who were there when I needed a push to continue my studies or a kind ear to listen to my academic adventures, I appreciate your support and your concern for me during the dissertation process.

I would like to thank another member of my support team. To my most devoted “little boy,” Otto, who was my constant companion during late night studying, the paper-writing sessions, and the frenzy of completing a dissertation, I thank you for being there and helping “Mommy” accomplish the largest undertaking of her life. Without your little brown dachshund eyes keeping track of all I did, my journey would have been a very long and lonely one.
Last, but not least, I wish to thank my Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, who brought all the right people at the right time and for the right reason into my life to make this journey one of the most priceless experiences in my life. To God, be the glory.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, Arnold and Evelyn Hirsch, who encouraged and supported me every step of the way. Their love and understanding inspired me to follow my heart and pursue education. I am a better person for having known and been loved by both of you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT .................................................................................................................. ii

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. v

DEDICATION ................................................................................................................... viii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ................................................................................................. ix

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. xiii

TABLE OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................... xiv

CHAPTER ONE  INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

  Overview ...................................................................................................................... 1

  Problem Statement ..................................................................................................... 6

  Purpose Statement ..................................................................................................... 6

  Research Question ..................................................................................................... 6

  Justification of the Study .......................................................................................... 8

  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 10

  Definition of Terms ................................................................................................... 10

  Limitations ................................................................................................................ 14

  Assumptions .............................................................................................................. 15

CHAPTER TWO  LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................... 17

  The Process of Differentiated Instruction ................................................................. 18

  Contributions from Leading Scholars ...................................................................... 23

  Current Research ....................................................................................................... 24
Procedures .................................................................................................................. 59

Data Sources and Collection ...................................................................................... 61
  Open-ended questionnaire......................................................................................... 61
  Focus group.............................................................................................................. 63
  Faculty interview...................................................................................................... 65
  Journals.................................................................................................................... 66
  Participant observation.............................................................................................. 68
  Documents.............................................................................................................. 69

Validity and Reliability ................................................................................................ 70

Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 73

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS ......................................................................................... 77

Evolution of Findings (Common Themes and Subthemes) ......................................... 80

Theme One: Valuing the Student .............................................................................. 88
  Personhood.............................................................................................................. 89
  Self-awareness........................................................................................................ 106
  Choice.................................................................................................................... 111
  Skills and multiple intelligences.......................................................................... 115

Theme Two: Framing.................................................................................................. 118
  Making meaning..................................................................................................... 119
  Context................................................................................................................... 123

Theme Three: Learning Environment ....................................................................... 126
  Safe learning environment.................................................................................... 126
  Freedom.................................................................................................................. 130
Structure. .............................. 134
Forced engagement ........................................ 139
Theme Four: Non-traditional Teaching Techniques .................. 140
  “Out-of-the-box” thinking .................................. 141
  Control over learning ........................................ 146
Theme Five: Behaviors of Engagement .................................. 151
  Enjoyment ................................................... 152
  Accountability ............................................... 155
  Ownership .................................................... 157
  Motivation .................................................... 160
  Creativity .................................................... 163

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION ........................................ 167
  Valuing the Student and Related Subthemes ...................... 167
  Framing and Related Subthemes ................................ 171
  Learning Environment ........................................ 172
  Non-Traditional Teaching Techniques ........................... 174
  Behaviors of Engagement and Related Subthemes ................ 176
  Recommendations ............................................ 177
  Conclusions .................................................. 179

REFERENCES .................................................. 180

APPENDIX A NURN 416 SYLLABUS .................................. 193
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.  Participant Profiles .................................................48
Table 2.  Case Study Timeline of Activities.................................56
Table 3.  Individual Participant Contributions to Research Data..........57
Table 4.  Data Collection Matrix of Sources of Evidence .................70
Table 5.  Number of References per Themes and Subthemes ..............88
TABLE OF FIGURES

*Figure 1.* Common Themes and Subthemes.................................................................78

*Figure 2.* Common Themes Version 1. .................................................................................81

*Figure 3.* Common Themes Version 2 .................................................................................83
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Overview

Imagine a one-room schoolhouse from long ago (Rutledge, 2007). Students of different ages and abilities all come together in one classroom to learn basic concepts of fundamental education. One instructor was charged with teaching standard content, but facing a myriad of learning needs as diverse as the individual students. The instructor had to adapt to the needs of the students in order to facilitate learning (Barrington, 2004). This is the essence of differentiated instruction.

The example of the one-room schoolhouse can be likened to today’s classroom composed of non-traditional, adult learners. Gardner (1999), in his theory of Multiple Intelligences, indicated that the adult learner brings a special profile of experience, ability, motivation, and preferences that highlight unique student needs. Differentiated instruction was developed as a teaching method that would address multidimensional needs of students in the same classroom.

Widely used in K-12 education for many years, the success of differentiated instruction among mainstream, gifted, and special education students is well-documented. Tomlinson (1999), credited as a leader of the differentiated instruction movement, integrated the concept at various levels of primary level education with success (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009). In addition, McTighe and Brown (2008) studied the application of this teaching method at the middle school level with positive results. Other experts in the field have incorporated differentiated instruction at the grade school level.
with positive outcomes, as well (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). While differentiated instruction has been widely used in K-12 settings, it has had minimal application in adult and higher education. The goal of differentiated instruction is to individualize and facilitate learning within a classroom of diverse students. Diverse learning needs of the non-traditional, adult student population represent a common factor between primary education and adult and higher education. Post-secondary institutions may benefit by incorporating differentiated instructional techniques into curricula given the increasing diversity of non-traditional, adult learner.

In 1953, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development issued a position statement that called for teachers to address individual learning of students in the mainstream, disabled, and/or gifted classroom. This emphasis stimulated the initial development of differentiated instruction (ASCD, 1953). Legislation passed by the U.S. Congress has helped to shape the face of differentiated instruction. Addendums to the Americans with Disabilities Act have set standards mandating that teachers facilitate learning among students who qualify for protection under this law (United States Congress, 1999). No Child Left Behind legislation (Board of Education, 2001) was also instrumental in bringing differentiated instruction to the forefront of education. Since its inception, differentiated instruction has undergone a process of formalization that established a universal definition and delineated specific criteria of the process.

Although mandates for instruction have been focused on K-12 population of students, there is merit to applying differentiated instruction to adult education. Non-traditional age learners bring a wealth of knowledge to the academic area. Whether it is
knowledge gained through life experience, prior education, or environmental influence, the diversity of such knowledge creates a classroom of adult learners who have abilities, talents, and learning styles/needs that are especially unique. Differentiated instruction is aimed at addressing diverse learning needs of individuals while maintaining curricular and performance standards. Use of this method may be instrumental in capitalizing on adult student strengths and promoting greater engagement in the learning process.

Non-traditional, adult students are enrolling in institutions of higher education in large numbers. It is estimated that 47% of all online students are non-traditional learners, as well as 37% of the traditional campus classroom population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). The increase in numbers of non-traditional, adult students has been fueled by personal desire for professional change, and an economy that has forced some workers to seek a more stable career (Indiana Workforce, 2009). The students come from a variety of environments. They possess a broad range of life experiences, as well as motivational factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Adult learners are the essence of diversity in the classroom (Knowles, 1984). All factors, combined with individual abilities and interests, contribute to a varied profile of the non-traditional or adult student.

In addition, a dilemma is created in that educators must meet learning needs of students who possess varied individual strengths and academic skills, while adhering to curricular goals and objectives. This diversity within the student population prompts educators to consider non-traditional means of providing effective and relevant education. An exploration of differentiated instruction as a viable means of teaching
adults is merited along with a discussion of selected adult learning theories and characteristics that support this teaching method.

Non-traditional, adult learners, according to Gardner (1983), possess areas of strengths known as intelligences. Linguistic, musical, existential, naturalist, logical-mathematical, visual/spatial, body-kinesthetic, and personal intelligences are all areas of strength and interest that comprise the theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993). The adult, through learned behavior and life experience, has cultivated preferences in one or more of the areas of intelligence. The type of intelligence that an adult brings to the learning environment helps to further substantiate one of the unique characteristics of the adult learner, as well as offer a potential framework for addressing the needs of the adult student population. Faculty must consider the specific characteristics of intelligence skills of the non-traditional, adult student and create an environment that facilitates diverse learning styles.

Another characteristic of non-traditional, adult learners is that they tend to be self-directed in learning (Knowles, 1970). This point is supported by Knowles’ theory of adult learning. Adult students become more independent while progressing academically and draw on personal experience as a resource for learning. Personal experiences of the adult are wholly unique and foster an individualized way of learning for each student (Knowles, 1978). In addition, the self-directed adult learner takes initiative when determining learning needs and is capable of formulating individual learning goals. The needs of the adult learner reach beyond traditional teaching methods to gain more from the learning experience that is relatable in terms of personal context (Knowles, 1984).
As non-traditional, adult students, with a wide range of learning skills, seek higher education, the need for a teaching model that can maximize student learning becomes a necessity. The personal strengths that the adult brings to the learning environment require intellectual stimulation that can capitalize on these strengths. Adult education must include diversity of teaching methods in order to reach the intended population. ‘One size fits all’ does not foster a student-focused learning environment, nor does it promote optimal learning among non-traditional students (Tate, 2004). The higher education faculty member is faced with the challenge of addressing diverse learning needs while maintaining the integrity of the curriculum. Differentiated instruction may be a means by which educators can best facilitate multiple learning needs of the non-traditional, adult learner (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999).

Students, who served as participants in this research study, were enrolled in the Baccalaureate Nursing Completion Program for Registered Nurses (RN-BSN) at a small, private, urban university in the Midwest and were all non-traditional, adult learners. They possessed a multitude of life experiences that could be utilized to enhance the individual’s learning and to increase the intrinsic value of nursing education. Learning styles of the adult student also varied, as do the learning styles of the K-12 student (Gardner, 1999). Such similarities in terms of the diversity of learning needs served as the reason to explore the use of differentiated instruction as a means of facilitating greater student engagement in a particular course in the RN-BSN program.
Problem Statement

Schools of nursing have experienced an increase in enrollment during recent years. As the number of adult learners enrolled in institutions of higher education increases, educators seek more effective means to maximize the learning potential for them. Nurse educators are faced with the challenge of meeting learning needs of the adult, working nurse. Traditional means of teaching may be adequate for some adult learners, but not necessarily for all adult learners. The problem is that there is a need for teaching techniques that not only capitalize on strengths of adult students, but also facilitate greater participation and engagement among students enrolled in RN-BSN nursing programs. In addition, very few research studies exist that have explored differentiated instructional techniques as applied to adults in higher education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore non-traditional, adult learners’ perceptions of the use of three differentiated instructional techniques in a RN-BSN program in terms of the impact on student engagement in a nursing course. In addition, the study addressed how non-traditional, adult learners engage with differentiated instructional techniques. Another purpose for the study was to obtain instructor and faculty observer perspectives of student engagement in response to the impact on differentiated instructional techniques.

Research Question

The primary research question for this study was: “How do non-traditional, adult learners engage with differentiated instructional techniques in an RN-BSN course?” The
topic was explored more fully in terms of the impact of differentiated instructional techniques on student engagement. Model building, literature circles, and tiered assignment were explored as the particular techniques to be studied. The techniques have been selected in lieu of other differentiated instructional techniques because each technique fits with the required content, without a massive restructuring of course learning activities.

For example, model building is a technique that allows students to be creative by graphically representing their personal model of health promotion and/or nursing theories related to health promotion. In this study, the goal of model building was to analyze a concept by exploring the intricate nature of the model in order to create a viable model, a goal of the strategy supported by Algozzine (2007). Literature circles allowed students to explore the required content in terms of choosing from a variety of topics to be discussed. They had freedom to choose from a number of topics that were of personal interest and, as a result, the circle provided personal meaning, as well as meeting the objectives of the course.

Tiered assignments were also introduced during the course. Tiered assignments were constructed by using Bloom’s taxonomy to create an assignment that became progressively more complex, an approach supported by Adams & Pierce (2006). The goal of the tiered assignment was to allow the student to meet course objectives in a manner that was conducive to learning preferences.
Justification of the Study

A case for using differentiated learning in adult and higher education can be made as the number and diversity of adult learners increases within the college classroom (Minot, 2010). In addition, the prospect of improved student engagement merits exploration. Non-traditional, adult learners may improve learning by making personal meaning of learning activities. According to Brookfield’s (1990) theory of adult learning, adults apply new information to a personal experience to fully understand the intent of new information. Participants in this study offered a variety of life experiences and interests, as well as motivational factors, which served as potentially valuable contributions to the learning environment.

Non-traditional, adult learners in higher education are the epitome of diversity in the classroom (Gardner, 1999). This type of learner brings a multitude of personal learning preferences and life experiences that comprise the diverse nature of students in higher education. In addition to this fact, non-traditional adults of varying ethnic and racial origins are enrolled in higher education courses, which adds to diversity in the classroom. All noted aspects are combined with individual abilities and interests to contribute to a varied profile of the adult learner (Kezar, 2001). The higher education faculty member is faced with the challenge of addressing the needs of a diverse student population. Differentiated instruction may be the teaching method that can best facilitate learning practices for non-traditional, adult learners.

Research of this nature is important to the institution at which the study was conducted. School of Nursing faculty at the research site were interested in new teaching
techniques that might increase comprehension of the curriculum, as well as elevating the meaning of education for students (Research Site Faculty, Personal Communication, 2010). The particular population from which participants were solicited had an average attrition rate of approximately 20% (Hankley, 2010). Reasons for withdrawing from the nursing program included failure to see relevance to individual practice area, inability to relate to the course content, along with financial and family concerns (Martin, 2011). Although differentiated instruction is not designed to address the latter concerns, it is focused on making meaning of education by personal application (Minot, 2010).

Differentiated instruction fosters personalization of education (Mann, 2008). Non-traditional, adult learners tend to frame education in terms of personal meaning and context (Gardner, 1999; Knowles, 1984). Although very few research studies have utilized differentiated instruction methods with adult learners, it was considered prudent to pursue research of this nature in order to find more effective teaching methods that might promote engagement of adult learners.

Additional justification for this study was supported by the theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993). Since differentiated instruction emphasizes individual strengths, it was postulated that the cognitive ability of the non-traditional/adult student might be well suited to a learning environment that capitalized on such varied intelligences. Using Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983), in conjunction with differentiated instructional techniques (i.e., tiered assignment), it was thought, might be a vehicle for improved student engagement while reducing attrition and making the educational experience more meaningful to the individual student.
Theoretical Framework

As noted in the preceding discussion, Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences has been tested throughout the field of K-12 education and found to be a useful framework for faculty who had been struggling with diverse learning needs of students (Kezar, 2001). With emphasis on intelligences—naturalist, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal, logical/mathematical, existential, musical, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, and intrapersonal, the theory focuses on a wide variety of strengths that an individual may possess (Gardner, 1993). Intelligences, whether in combination or individual, are present to some degree in all adult students (Gardner, 2011). Gardner argued that learners may cultivate new intelligences when required to participate in an activity or event in which an intelligence, other than those previously required, is necessary to be successful (Gardner, 1993).

According to Amerson (2006), an adult learner, with a diverse background of life experiences and opportunities to acquire talents, would most likely benefit from a curricular structure that includes Gardner’s principles. From a practical perspective, Barrington (2004) and Kezar (2001) discussed the value of differentiated instruction, based on individual needs and preferences, tied to course requirements. The authors’ points of view served as a framework for this study.

Definition of Terms

Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence – Intelligence is formed from physical experiences such as touching, feeling, holding, doing, and getting practical hands-on experiences. Thinking
and feeling through touch and movement is a component of this type of intelligence (Gardner, 1983).

**Choice boards** – A tic-tac-toe board designed to provide students with choice and challenge in learning. Students choose assignments from the board to form a tic-tac-toe in a row, column, or diagonally. Assignments are placed on the board so that any tic-tac-toe formation will provide a cohesive product that embodies more than one component of learning (Adams & Pierce, 2010).

**Differentiated instruction** – A method of teaching that incorporates learning activities best suited to an individual student’s learning preferences without compromising the integrity of learning goals (Tomlinson, 1999).

**Existential intelligence** – Intelligence that embodies sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence, such as the meaning of life, why do we die, and how did we get here. Persons who possess this type of intelligence can see the big picture (Gardner, 1983 & 1999).

**Focus group** – A small group of participants ranging in numbers from five to ten who come together to discuss a set of issues predetermined by the moderator (Krueger, 2008).

**Framing** - Personal interpretation of the meaning of an experience or event as it relates to one’s life. Framing assists one to link current experience with past experience so that the individual can conceptualize the experience and determine place and value of the experience (Mezirow, 1991).
Interpersonal intelligence - Learners benefit from being able to see things from others point of view such as considering how an individual may have been feeling at the time of a particular experience or event (Gardner, 1983).

Intrapersonal intelligence – Intelligence is formed by knowing personal feeling and how one may react to certain situations in the near future. Prefers to learn by thinking and working quietly and independently of a group (Gardner, 1999).

Learning environment - The setting in which a student learns such as a traditional classroom, online classroom, home, library or other locations as determined by the student (Researcher, 2012).

Literature circles – Small groups of students discuss reading assignments in a non-linear format that allows each student to perform the role of leader or recorder (Schlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999). Students are allowed to select discussion topics that are of personal interest from a wide range of categories. Personal insight and opinions about the reading are discussed until a resolution or agreement to disagree is reached.

Logical/mathematical intelligence - Learners who possess this intelligence ask lots of questions and are good puzzle solvers. Prefers to experiment and see logical and numerical patterns in their work by making connections between pieces of information (Gardner, 1999).

Model building – Creating a physical or written representation of an event, structure, or theory that enlightens other students about a concept, period of time, or way of thinking (Bailey & Williams-Black, 2006).
Musical intelligence - Learning style that involves the transfer of information through sound, song, music and listening to jingles, rhythms and rhymes (Gardner, 1983).

Naturalist intelligence - Learners flourish from being able to touch, feel, hold, and try practical hands-on experiences, but generally outdoors within the environment, nature and animals. Learn best by having the hands-on approach, noticing and using the environment (Gardner, 1983).

Non-traditional/adult learners - One who possesses one or more of the following characteristics: did not attend college shortly after high school graduation, works 35 hour or more per week, has dependents other than a spouse, attends school on a part-time basis, is a single parent, or is financially independent as determined by financial aid criteria (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Non-traditional teaching techniques – Techniques, methods, or strategies that are not commonly used within the traditional or online classroom (Researcher, 2012).

NURN 416 – A senior level nursing course for RN-BSN students focused on health promotion cross the lifespan. Major components include Healthy People 2020, Leading Health Indicators, developmental levels from infancy to older adulthood, and key issues of health promotion (Researcher, 2012).

Self-awareness - Knowing personal limitations, needs, boundaries and abilities in relation to the task at hand (Gardner, 1993).

Self-directed learning – Learning that occurs as determined by the student. Pace, complexity, spectrum, and responsibility for learning are developed according to the adult learner needs (Knowles, 1978).
**Student engagement** – (conceptual definition). The process of participating internally and externally in the learning experience via emotional, physical, and cognitive involvement (Belliveau-Brown, 2008).

**Student Engagement** – (operational definition) Behaviors performed by students that indicate participation in the learning experience. Examples: active listening, asking thought-provoking questions, reading and re-reading course content, completing course work at or above the required level, and actively communicating with fellow students and course faculty by making sound contributions to discussions via in-class or online methods. Generally, behaviors of engagement are the outward expression of efforts to be involved in learning (Belliveau-Brown, 2008).

**Verbal/linguistic intelligence** – Type of intelligence that favors transfer of information through writing, reading and listening to the spoken word, such as conversation, discussions or debates. Prefers words to pictures (Gardner, 1999).

**Visual/spatial intelligence** - Learning style involves the use of visual or observed things. This includes pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flash cards and flip-charts. Prefers to look at the pictures and diagrams in books prior to reading about them (Gardner, 1999).

**Limitations**

The sample was drawn from the target population of non-traditional, adult learners enrolled in a senior-level nursing course (NURN 416). NURN 416 is a required course for the RN-BSN completion programs in the School of Nursing. The course size was restricted to 32 students per research site policy. Eleven of 21 students enrolled in
NURN 416 participated in the study. Due to the limited number of participants, findings of the study were not sufficient to generalize to any other population of non-traditional/adult learners in other nursing schools.

Data for analysis were limited in a couple of instances. The lack of an adequate number of volunteers for the journaling component affected the scope of data available for analysis from this source of data collection. Similarly, student responses to the questionnaire were constrained, given that at the time the questionnaires were administered, the amount of work in which students were engaged was significant.

For instructors, the researcher, and the students, the novelty of DI compared to traditional approaches to course instruction may have biased their perceptions. Given the accelerated nature of the course offered in an 8-week format, it was not possible to study any long-term effects of the implementation of DI.

Assumptions

An important assumption of this study was that students would complete the course assignments according to their personal learning preferences. To assist in this regard, an orientation to the study was provided at the outset of the course. Learning preferences were likened to Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and the relationship between preferences and course assignments was discussed. Study participants were given the illustration of a design in a tiered assignment based on a preference for an oral presentation, having talent in verbal and linguistic intelligence areas. It was emphasized that they would self-select assignments based on their intelligence preference. Nonetheless, it was not possible to guarantee that students, in
fact, chose a learning preference over the desire to choose an approach a friend chose or one that was more convenient to complete.

It was also assumed that study participants would accurately describe their perceptions of the differentiated instruction activities. It was possible, that while students were assured that their grades would not be affected by participating or not, they may have, nonetheless, believed that sharing positive comments about their experiences would be advantageous. Understanding that new approaches to teaching the course were being introduced, the students may also have surmised that the researcher and instructors were favorably disposed to differentiated instruction activities; hence, students may have been disposed to speak more favorably about their experiences than they might have been, otherwise.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in the introduction of this study, the description of differentiated instruction began with a picture of a one-room schoolhouse of long ago. Students of varying levels of ability and developmental levels were educated in the same environment (Rutledge, 2007). Each student progressed at a pace that allowed for maximal learning. Outcomes of learning differed depending on ability, effort, and interest. Individual accomplishment within academic guidelines rather than uniform learning was the goal.

Students who were members of a class that employed differentiated instruction progressed at a pace that allowed for knowledge acquisition and use of their learning preferences (Allen & Tomlinson, 2000). The concept of individualized education is the root of differentiated instruction.

The framework of differentiated instruction is based on assessing students’ readiness to learn, using a preferred learning style, and incorporating personal strengths and interests in order to acquire an adequate level of knowledge (Tomlinson, 1999). Many researchers have linked the preferred learning style to Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983), in that the intelligences or talents that one possesses tend to correspond to one’s learning. Once this step is accomplished, the
educator is free to differentiate course content, the process by which students are educated, and the end product of knowledge acquisition. All components are integral to the concept of differentiated instruction.

Tomlinson (2003) described differentiated instruction as a teaching method that celebrates differences in all aspects of learning. McTighe and Brown (2008) touted it as a teaching mechanism that promotes a learning environment in which levels of accomplishment for each student are very different and uniformity is minimized. Each student is allowed to learn in a manner conducive to individual needs, but still meets the objectives of the course.

**The Process of Differentiated Instruction**

The process of differentiated instruction has been referred to as a method of teaching and not a teaching technique. Leading scholars agree with this characterization (Tomlinson, 1999; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). A description of the process provides a foundation upon which teaching techniques commonly associated with differentiated instruction were utilized for this research study.

Differentiated instruction encompasses six major components: readiness, interests, learning profile, content, process, and product. Differentiated instruction is a teaching model based on the premise that the approach to learning should be flexible and adapted to meet the learning needs of individual students (Tomlinson, 1999). Regardless of the educational environment, this model of teaching requires educators to be flexible with teaching techniques and to adjust the learning environment to learners’ needs rather than expecting students to modify their individual learning styles to the curriculum.
(Tomlinson et al., 2008). The uniqueness of the student is emphasized by the very nature of differentiated instruction.

The major components of the first phase of differentiated instruction are readiness, interest, and learning profile (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). The three concepts are integral to academic success when progressing to the second phase of differentiated instruction by modifying the additional components of content, process, and product (Subban, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999). It is important to note that course requirements and the integrity of the curriculum are not compromised for the sake of implementing this teaching method (Manning, Stanford, & Reeves, 2010). Faculty who incorporate differentiated instruction must address all of the basic components for the curriculum to be truly differentiated.

Readiness is defined as students’ understanding of the type of instruction that is planned, along with adequate preparation for the learning experience. The goal of readiness is to ensure that students are provided with an appropriate foundation upon which differentiated instruction took place (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009). Once an understanding has been established, students’ interests are addressed. Students’ interests are the areas or topics that are meaningful to the individual, as well as academically pertinent (Tomlinson, 2005). Consideration of a student’s interest promotes engagement and motivation, as well as fostering a connection with course learning objectives (Williams-Black, Bailey, & Coleman, 2010). The learning profile is also crucial to differentiated instruction. The learning profile may consist of personal intelligence preference (Gardner, 1999), group orientation, cognitive style, and learning environment
preference (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). An accurate learning profile is necessary to
determine the appropriate learning method and serves as a basis for making learning
choices. All three components must be adequately assessed to incorporate the next steps:
content, process, and product.

According to Subban (2006), content of the curriculum and the individual course
should be modified on a limited basis in terms of what is being taught, along with
consideration of how students access the material. Modification is inherently necessary
in a differentiated classroom, but not to the extent that significant differences exist in
terms of individual expectation (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009). Content and
expectations should remain relatively consistent among learners, but the means by which
students acquire information and learn should be the focus of modification.

The process can be thought of as making meaning of academic activities in a
manner that allows each student to incorporate individual interests, preferences, and
strengths (Tomlinson, 2005). Process can be described as the task, or series of tasks, that
foster student engagement with the content. Variances in the process are determined by
the initial components of differentiated instruction: readiness for learning, personal
interest or intelligence, and learning styles or preferences. Students participate in
learning activities that meet prescribed course objectives, but the techniques vary greatly,
as is the nature of differentiated instruction (Subban, 2006). The content remains
consistent, but it is the process by which a student accesses relevant resources and
accomplishes the learning objectives that will appear to be different.
Product is the last component of differentiated instruction. Products are the culminating assessments that allow students to demonstrate learning and application of knowledge (McTighe & Brown, 2008). For example, a grading rubric that is highly detailed and very specific in nature would be in contrast to the premise of differentiated instruction. Effective product assessments include clear criteria, but allow for variance in modes of expression (Tomlinson, 2005). On-going support and assessment are key features of a product assessment. In order to achieve a successful assessment, opportunities for continual self-evaluation should be included as a student completes each of the learning activities.

Students in a differentiated classroom have a degree of freedom in designing a learning experience that maximizes skills, while accomplishing academic goals. This degree of independence, combined with a propensity for self-direction (Knowles, 1984), makes differentiated instruction a potential method for enhancing the learning experience of the non-traditional, adult student.

Non-traditional, adult students, in general, bring a wealth of skills, intelligence preferences, and learning styles to academia (Gardner, 1999) and may thrive on an individual approach to learning. Given the characteristics of the adult learner, exploration of differentiated instruction is warranted. Several educators have recently identified this model as a potential method of facilitating adult education in a classroom of students with highly diverse backgrounds of life experiences and abilities (Tobin, 2009).
Adapting the concept of differentiated instruction for the non-traditional, adult learner is a daunting task for even the most experienced faculty member, and it is not without obstacles. The focus should be on student learning needs that can be addressed via this teaching method. Faculty may experience some degree of concern about “teaching for understanding versus teaching skills” (Tobin, 2009). This premise is an age-old dilemma that faculty encounter when educating students for “need to know” concepts in lieu of “nice to know” concepts. Teachers who have significant experience with the differentiated classroom report difficulty in meeting both needs, unless specific components of the method are made clear (Wells & Shaughnessy, 2010). McTighe and Brown (2008) suggested that teaching for understanding will not be successful unless the main concepts of differentiated instruction are the unwavering focus of the learning design. Flexibility and a student-driven mindset must be a priority in order to foster optimal learning (Tobin, 2009).

There are numerous teaching techniques commonly associated with differentiated instruction available to the educator. It is important to note that the methods discussed must be used in the context of the framework of differentiated instruction. The most common teaching techniques used with differentiated instruction are tiered assignments, literature circle, group debate, think-pair-share, mentor study, model building, simulation, and independent study (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1953; Tomlinson, 2005). Each method requires the student to be accountable for learning, motivation, and meeting course objectives.
Contributions from Leading Scholars

A brief overview of the work of leading scholars should be included in the literature review as a means of gaining insight into the process of differentiated instruction. The internationally recognized leading scholar in differentiated instruction is Carol Ann Tomlinson. Tomlinson authored numerous articles and books on the subject as well as conducted numerous research studies (Huebner, 2010). Tomlinson (1999) examined school-level and district-level implementation of differentiated instruction and identified ways that education leaders can best support the practice. Her sense of responsibility has prompted collaboration in the field with several other leading scholars listed below. She is by far the leading expert in the evolution of differentiated instruction.

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe are also leaders in the area of assessment of differentiated instruction (Rutledge, 2007). The authors coined the phrase “backwards design” and promoted the concept of understanding the individual student by focusing on the design of the curriculum and related components (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Each author is engaged in current research projects focused on additional methods of assessing student progress associated with differentiated instruction.

Patricia Wolfe (2001) is a noted scholar who brought the science of brain research into the classroom with a focus on student differences in learning. Wolfe’s efforts have provided educators with ideas for improving education and teaching philosophies. She was also instrumental in incorporating Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences into her research regarding readiness and the learning profile.
Eric Jensen’s scholarly efforts have linked Wolfe’s brain research with his research on learner differences in terms of emotions, memory, and relationship to student success in the differentiated classroom. The initial work, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, addressed some of the extraneous aspects of learning that affect student progress (Jensen, 1998). Regardless of the area of focus, each scholar contributed greatly to the philosophy of differentiated instruction.

**Current Research**

Little research involving use of teaching techniques associated with differentiated instruction at the adult and higher education level has been conducted. Studies focused on some aspect of this philosophy at the post-secondary level are described in the following paragraphs.

Ernst and Ernst (2005) conducted research involving the impressions of differentiated learning by students and faculty in an undergraduate political science course. The instructors tested the teaching philosophy in an undergraduate political science course and surveyed students about impressions of differentiated instruction. A case study methodology was employed. Students were divided into groups according to readiness, and assignments were differentiated accordingly. Results of the study showed that 60% of all students were satisfied with differentiated instruction. A total of 82% reported that the class allowed students to live up to their potential. Only 7% of the 35 participants preferred the traditional lecture format. The instructors’ evaluation was also positive, although time commitment and concerns about fairness were described as limitations. The researchers concluded that due to the overwhelmingly positive response,
higher education is well suited to differentiated instruction. The authors recommended that additional research is necessary in order to understand the broader impact.

Another study explored how university professors incorporated differentiated instruction. A survey by Williams-Black, Bailey, and Coleman (2010) explored the methods by which higher education faculty use differentiated instruction. Surveys and open-ended questions were the main data collection techniques for this study. The results indicated that the content was differentiated based on student prior learning. Process was differentiated by allowing students to choose textbooks, tiered assignments, and choice of research topics. Product was differentiated by using essential questions that guided and refocused the student on the overarching goals of the course. One important finding was that respondents were eager to share how faculty differentiated learning, but were unable to articulate the underlying philosophy. An implication of the study was that university professors should increase understanding of differentiated instruction for proper implementation.

Minot (2010) conducted a research study at a teacher education institution in Kentucky. The author explored the role of reflection in the process of differentiated instruction. Findings indicated that reflection by the student enabled faculty to modify curriculum to meet individual student needs. The author also found that reflection facilitated delivery of differentiated instruction. Reflection-in-action was especially useful during formative assessment. A recommendation of the study called for reflection to be further explored as a key factor in the philosophy of differentiated instruction.

In this study, the researchers surveyed the use of differentiated instruction in an introductory level graduate course with students of varying levels of interest, readiness,
and learning profiles. Tomlinson and Santangelo (2009) performed a self-study examining the benefits, challenges, and future directions of differentiated instruction in adult and higher education. Findings suggested that differentiation had a positive and meaningful impact on student performance. Reflections from students indicated that they were appropriately challenged, and students found meaning in the course content and activities. Another finding was that Tomlinson’s framework (Tomlinson, 2005) can be utilized to address the learning needs of a diverse student population. One student stated that if more educators used this teaching philosophy, learning would increase dramatically (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). Probably the most pertinent and significant finding was that the efficacy associated with K-12 education can also be realized by post-secondary institutions (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009).

**Concerns Associated with Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instructional teaching techniques and use are not without concerns. As with any teaching technique, there is a downside that may have an impact on implementation in the learning environment. There is a conflict between teaching for understanding and teaching for skills (Tobin, 2009). Adhering to standards of accreditation and program requirements may have a limiting effect on implementation of differentiated instruction. This is an age-old dilemma that most faculty experience when educating students for “need to know” in lieu of what is “nice to know.” Tobin (2009) stated that teaching for understanding should incorporate the entire range of learning goals when designing curricula involving differentiated instruction.

Another concern with this method of teaching is the use of small groups versus whole class instruction (Allen & Tomlinson, 2000). Schools that have no choice but to
deliver content via large lecture halls or over-sized classrooms present a considerable challenge to educators who believe in differentiation. Even when a large group of students is divided into small group assignments, the instructor must contend with the difficulty in managing the number of groups. When a large number of groups must share learning experiences, the question of time and covering all of the required content arises. This is problematic, given that research indicates that the smaller the size of the initial whole group, the greater the chance of success with differentiation (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). Class size may cause faculty to see differentiated instruction as futile.

The most significant concern with using teaching techniques commonly associated with differentiated instruction is time. All members of the teaching profession, in any type of educational institution, at any level, at any time, can identify with the need for more time to properly implement new teaching techniques. Differentiated instruction calls for a commitment to a greater amount of time for curricular design, pre-assessment of learning styles, and evaluation (Huebner, 2010). Support and direction for students completing differentiated learning activities takes additional time, but in order to meet individual learning needs, it must be done. Mann (2008) postulated that if a mechanism of teacher support were in place, such as assistants or altered teaching load, more faculty would engage in differentiated instruction. Time concerns are the most difficult of obstacles to address.

**Supporting Components**

Differentiated instruction cannot stand alone. If the concept is to be used in higher education, supporting components that are already in place at most institutions should be included in the process. Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences is integral
to differentiated education (Kezar, 2001) because it promotes integration of prominent intelligences as a means of accomplishing course work. A description of Gardner’s theory and the intelligences was described in the preceding chapter.

**Bloom’s Taxonomy**

Bloom’s Taxonomy is also an appropriate component for supporting differentiated learning activities (Tomlinson, 2005) in that it is expected that students elevate the level of learning as they progress with their education. Bloom and associates created a taxonomy of the cognitive domain of learning that has become the standard for differentiating concepts of teaching and learning assessments as well as learning objectives. Since then, educators in institutions of higher learning have incorporated the taxonomy into curricular designs in nearly all disciplines (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). The nature of the taxonomy promotes differentiated instruction by categorizing achievement into levels. The original version of the Taxonomy was developed in 1956, with a revision published in 2001. The revision of the taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) has been scrutinized by researchers and found favor among a large numbers of higher education faculty. The result of the revision of the taxonomy can be seen in the new levels of learning. The new levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

The most significant revision to the taxonomy was the addition of ‘creating’ as the highest level. Non-traditional, adult learners in higher education tend to possess life skills that foster creativity. The concept of creativity embodies all of the categories at the preceding levels, but allows for a broader means of attaining the highest level of the taxonomy. The melding of Bloom’s taxonomy, the skills of the adult learner, and
enhanced teaching techniques associated with differentiated instruction provide an opportunity for most students to incorporate creativity in learning activities (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The taxonomy is useful for educators to design assignments that encompass a variety of abilities and talents. It is also useful for adult learners in terms of providing an outlet of incorporating personal experience as appropriate to the learning experience. Adult students in higher education bring a plethora of life experiences and learning needs to the classroom, and as a result, the need for flexibility in learning is necessary. A course curricula designed as a “one size fits all” would be a disservice to the non-traditional, adult learner.

**Techniques of Differentiated Instruction**

There are numerous teaching techniques associated with differentiated instruction available to faculty. It is important to note that the methods discussed must be used in the context of the philosophy of differentiated instruction. The most common techniques used with differentiating instruction are tiered assignments, literature circle, group debate, pair/share, mentor study, model building, simulation, and independent study, and choice boards. Each method is widely used in primary and secondary education. Some techniques have been used in higher education on a very limited basis. It is important to note that each technique can be adapted for the non-traditional, adult learner in higher education.

**Tiered assignment.**

One of the methods associated with differentiated instruction that is particularly conducive to adult learning needs is the tiered assignment. Tiered assignment is a means
by which the student exponentially builds upon individual learning. It involves a series of learning activities that increase in complexity of task and thought combined with a common goal or outcome related to curricular objectives (Mann, 2008). Students address the same concepts and essential ideas, but the means of accomplishing the assignment are vastly different depending on individual learning profiles (Tillman, 2003). This teaching technique is readily accessible to students of all abilities because it is designed to enhance the inherent learning style of the student.

Tiered assignments are a viable learning activity for non-traditional, adult learners in higher education when used in conjunction with Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning, which is widely used at universities across the country (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). This concept is extremely relevant to the tiered assignment, in that the student completes one phase of the assignment at a designated level of learning and progresses to the next phase of the assignment, which involves a higher level of learning and more extensive skills. Revisions to the taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) have placed greater emphasis on the evaluation and creativity categories which are also integral components of the tiered assignment.

Creativity takes many forms and can be expressed in various ways. A non-traditional, adult learner employs personal intelligence skills when accomplishing creative learning tasks (Gardner, 1993). In order to complete a tiered assignment, non-traditional, adult learners must draw on creative capabilities as well as unique gifts to complete the learning activity. For example, a student may possess a high level of visual/spatial intelligence and choose to meet the requirements of the assignment by accentuating that particular intelligence. By knowing personal intelligence preferences,
the adult learner is participating in self-evaluation which incorporates Bloom’s Taxonomy. A tiered assignment requires the student to be continually immersed in ongoing evaluation of self and the assignment (Mann, 2008).

Tiered assignments require a degree of independence and ability to be self-directed (Tillman, 2003). Even though continual support is provided for the student by the facilitator, the student exercises a degree of freedom in completing the assignment. Non-traditional, adult students tend to embody a preference for both characteristics when actively participating in a learning activity (Knowles, 1984). The purpose of tiered assignments is to foster self-motivated desire to reach beyond prior learning and take responsibility for one’s academic endeavors. The design of the tiered assignment, coupled with Bloom’s Taxonomy, multiple intelligences, self-direction, and the independent nature of the non-traditional, adult learner results in a learning activity that can be tailored to the needs of the adult learner. If activities do not consistently and directly relate to the design of this teaching technique, the learning is not differentiated instruction. It is just different (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009).

Tiered assignments are parallel tasks that vary in level of complexity and abstractness (Mann, 2008). This type of assignment includes a scaffolding structure that promotes individual learning by increasing the complexity of the learning activity within the tiers of the assignment. Student populations tend to vary in degrees of ability. In higher education, the goal is to invert the pyramid by the end of a course or at an academic level. The number of students who are functioning at a higher level will have increased, hopefully, in response to tiered assignments that become more difficult and thought provoking. A non-traditional, adult learner may begin a course by completing
basic assignments, but progress to problem solving at an advanced level of critical thinking.

An example of a tiered assignment for a non-traditional, adult learner who is enrolled in a community health course would be a tri-level project involving homelessness. Learners would be asked to research homelessness via literature and experiential means. Lower functioning learners would receive more direction than higher functioning learners. The second assignment would be to apply fact-based information to a situation. The final project would be conducted in first person by story-telling or story-writing about a week in the life of a homeless person. Variations on this assignment could include a focus on the persona of an immigrant, isolated older adult, or other vulnerable populations served by the community or public health services. Tiered assignments for the adult learner may also include a grading rubric of criteria for receiving an ‘A’ ‘B’ or ‘C’, depending on ability, effort, and quality of work.

**Literature circles.**

The literature circle is one of the differentiated techniques that is most adaptable to adult and higher education. Students are assigned to small groups based upon the goal of discussing literature of an assignment from a textbook (Schlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999). Each student participates by offering personal insight and opinions about the reading. A discussion of ideas is the goal of the circle with members agreeing to disagree if there is non-resolution of issues. Students focus on the discussion of all aspects of the topic rather than bringing a consensus report to the remainder of the class.

An example of a literature circle at the higher education level would be examining research studies related to a broad topic. Student groups would be assigned a general
category of a health promotion issue such as nutrition, fitness, or stress management. Each student would be required to find a research article about the topic and discuss it within the circle. For example, fitness articles might include a research study about walking versus running, while other studies chosen by students may encompass weight training, accuracy of body mass index (BMI) measurements, or effectiveness of toning exercises. The group would respond to others’ contributions and engage in a dialogue about application to health promotion. The literature circle is a strategy for students to come together in small groups and discuss a particular reading assignment (Schlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999). The discussions serve to not only summarize the reading assignment, but also to assist students in making connections of key concepts. In addition, students learn from each other and internalize the meaning of the content.

A technique similar to this was used in an undergraduate classroom with success. Kasworm (2003) found that adult students reported that literature circles helped provide a framework for relating content to individual understanding. The researcher suggested that adult students may achieve better learning when able to make a personalized connection to a reading assignment in terms of self, work, family, and/or community. In effect, literature circles allowed the non-traditional, adult student to become more engaged in the content when personal meaning was incorporated.

Literature circles may also be appropriate for the adult learner if structured in a manner that addresses adult learning principles (Pate-Moulton, Klages, Erickson, & Conforti, 2004). A non-traditional, adult student requires a degree of independence when selecting topics relevant to course content and personal experience (Knowles, 1978). If an adult is able to choose a literary work that is of personal interest, it is more likely that
the student will better engage in the literature circle discussion and glean more knowledge in the process.

Literature circles offer the flexibility of structure that engages adult learners by virtue of drawing on personal experience as it pertains to the discussion topic. In addition to this, the adult learner will draw upon intelligences when making contributions to the learning environment (Gardner, 1999), and thus become a more productive member of the circle. For example, a student may provide a visual example of a concept related to health promotion of the newborn, with visual intelligence as the dominant intelligence. Another student may relate a concept to a textual example of newborn health promotion that draws on unique life experience (Gardner, 1984). The result is an environment in which adult learners increase knowledge by exchanging ideas of how the designated topic relates to individual lives while drawing on individual multiple intelligences as a means of engagement in the learning activity.

**Group debate.**

Group debate is a teaching technique commonly associated with differentiated instruction that is particularly well suited to adult and higher education. The typical student has some grasp of current issues and generally has an opinion on many topics. The definition of group debate is a student group that coordinates a balanced, formal debate related to course content (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). A balanced presentation of the issues is the heart of this method. In an ideal situation, students expand the thinking process to create remarks both consistent and inconsistent with personal views and debate either the affirmative or the negative side with as enthusiasm
and knowledge. The student must be well versed in both sides of the debate instead of one perspective on the topic.

A health promotion course could incorporate group debate as a differentiated assignment. The debate question could be: “Is the Health Care Reform Bill (H.R. 3962, 2009) adequate?” Students functioning at a lower level would participate in this assignment along with students who function at higher levels due to the personal implications of the topic. Learning from this activity comes when a student must present a side of the issue that directly conflicts with personal views. The intensity of the debate may vary with the ability of the group as a whole, but the grading rubric would reflect the effort according to set criteria.

**Pair-share.**

Pair-share is also known as think-pair-share (Lyman, 2001). This is a discussion strategy that provides a structure while allowing students to internalize content. It keeps students on task and promotes accountability for results and participation. The advantage of think-pair-share is that it can be used in classrooms of varying sizes as well as in small or large group discussions.

The first step is to pose a question that invites students to think about the answer for a few moments. Then students discuss answers with a predetermined partner. The pair compares one another’s response and identifies the best answer(s). The instructor calls for pairs of students to share their responses to the question.

Although this method sounds quite common, students are engaged in critical thinking at varying levels along with active listening to the responses of others. Discussions are focused, but allow for students to express ideas and use discernment
skills. Non-traditional, adult learners may respond better to active participation rather than to a traditional lecture (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). This technique of differentiation allows for a more focused response that may be more conducive to the learning needs of the non-traditional, adult student.

**Mentor study.**

A mentor study is “. . . a reciprocal agreement between mentor and student to create a learning activity that results in a cooperative study or project” (Huebner, 2010, p. 81). The mentor, in the case of primary and secondary education, is the classroom teacher. The mentor for a non-traditional, adult student could be another faculty member or a student who has previously completed the course.

The following is an example of a mentor study for higher education. An undergraduate nursing student is assigned to create a case study exercise for a pathophysiology class. The topic is myocardial infarction. Course faculty would assist the student in creating a working partnership with a graduate nursing student (mentor) who is conducting research on the same topic for a thesis. It is understood that the undergraduate student is not to act as an assistant to the graduate student, but as a mentee seeking guidance from the mentor. Course faculty would assume the role of coordinator and sounding board for both mentee and mentor. The undergraduate learns from a graduate student and the graduate learns from the undergraduate in terms of giving guidance and professional direction. The goal of the mentor study is reciprocal learning that benefits both parties (Huebner, 2010).
Model building.

Model building is a method for creating a physical or written representation of an event or structure that enlightens others. An example of model-building in adult and higher education would be for nursing students to utilize philosophical models used in the delivery of patient care. A student in a medical-surgical nursing class could create a model of clinical decision-making in reference to the ethics of nursing practice. Another assignment could be to develop a model of health promotion that addresses the lifestyle of a particular developmental level. The focus of this technique of differentiated instruction would be to become aware of existing models while incorporating individual creativity.

Simulation.

Simulation is widely used in nursing. Less technical forms of simulation are used in primary and secondary education. Simulation is a learning activity that resembles a realistic situation or scenario in which students must draw on abilities to incorporate critical thinking skills (Jeffries, 2008). Decision-making, problem-solving, and concept exploration are common to any simulation event.

Adult education in nursing incorporates simulation in the form of playing a role in a situation and solving a problem. Differentiated instruction would require levels of simulations to be available so as to offer a learning experience in which students of all abilities could receive benefits. As an additional example of this technique, an assignment could be that a student would develop a simulation activity, complete with course objectives, role delineation, and evaluation. By doing this, the student would have a better understanding of the value of simulation as a learning experience. It should be
noted that simulation activities should vary in level of difficulty as related to student ability so that the individual can progress at a rate conducive to the learning style.

**Independent study.**

Another method of differentiated instruction is independent study. Independent study as defined by Mann (2008) is not a separate course of study, but a study within a designated course. Independent study projects are conducted within a context of an established course objective. Differentiated independent study at the higher education level is not a special course with a special registration prefix, but a required activity within a designated course. No additional credit hours are received other than the hours associated with the original course credit. An example of this would be a nursing student in a health promotion class who is unable to find any of the differentiated assignments listed for course activities conducive to personal learning style and needs. The student would suggest a topic and a potential series of activities that would be involved in the project with approval of course faculty. With this approach, the student learns about an area of interest while meeting individual and course objectives.

**Choice boards.**

The choice board is another differentiated instructional technique that provides an opportunity for students to meet three course objectives by choosing from a selection of learning activities designed to facilitate knowledge acquisition (Adams & Pierce, 2010). The board is constructed in a manner similar to a “tic-tac-toe” board. The columns of three squares represent the course objectives. The three activities listed under each course objective are varied in skill sets required to complete the learning activity. The student is required to select an activity from each row so a “tic-tac-toe” is completed.
Choice boards facilitate student learning by allowing one to select learning activities that are interrelated and capitalize on student strengths and interests (Adams & Pierce, 2010).

All methods of differentiated instruction should be assessed using a grading rubric (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Rubrics are general and should allow for different levels of student performance and creativity, rather than prescriptive and restrictive (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

**Gardner, Bloom, and Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction lends itself well for integration of Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Bloom’s taxonomy of learning. Although for this study, the entire course was not conducted as a fully differentiated classroom, components of each theory were included in the study. All assignments had a degree of choice integrated into the required objectives. Students could select assignments that allowed each to utilize their learning preferences. The same was true for literature circles and model building. Gardner’s Theory (1983) was used as a guide for selection of learning activities.

In addition to Gardner, Bloom’s taxonomy was used as a guide for writing objectives for all learning assignments. Students created learning objectives at a minimum of the application level (Bloom, et al., 1956). From that level, students were free to create objectives at higher levels. The taxonomy served as a barometer of progress for students to consult as the learning experience continued.

**The Concept of Student Engagement**

Student engagement in learning is integral to attainment of knowledge. Educators in any teaching situation strive to create a learning environment that promotes participation and involvement of students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). In order to
understand the concept of student engagement, descriptions of the concept should be discussed. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) described student engagement in terms of behaviors and interactions among faculty and students. Behaviors that build the foundation for a positive learning experience, such as speaking in the affirmative and offering constant encouragement, are integral to planning academic success. The greater the effort to be actively involved on the part of the faculty, the greater the response of the students to interaction with faculty.

In addition to behaviors and interactions of faculty with students, Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) stated that research studies are necessary to study engagement from the students’ point of view. This position was supported by Pascarella (2001), who stated that nothing is known about how and why students are actively engaged in learning. The researcher described engagement as active and passive learning. Pascarella (2001) delineated verbal and non-verbal participation as engagement. Other qualities of engagement included active listening and taking responsibility for academic performance.

Popkess (2010) identified student engagement as active learning behaviors within the classroom. The researcher defined engagement by active participation noting that learning strategies that create an environment of engagement in which students are more likely to become actively involved in discussion, group work, or projects should encourage students to take responsibility for individual learning.

Lyons (2006) defined student engagement as involvement or participation inside and outside of class. The researcher reported that engagement in course activities may occur as a result of the design of each activity within the course. In addition to this,
Lyons reported that non-traditional students found that learning activities that incorporated oral participation and/or small group work were beneficial.

Mullen, Fish, and Hutinger (2010) defined student engagement in terms of the potential results of empowerment and skills building. The researchers argued that student engagement is not only the performance, but also the results of the performance. They emphasized that engagement was crucial to reciprocal and group learning. Another means of defining student engagement is through Bloom’s taxonomy (Atkinson, 2011). Atkinson conducted research in which an element of Bloom’s taxonomy was used to describe and promote engagement. Learning activities became progressively more difficult as the student accomplished each level. Student engagement was described in terms of the ability to apply knowledge, analysis of knowledge, creativity, hypothesize, and theorize. Using this taxonomy in a manner that is meaningful to the student was emphasized as a means of improving student engagement by challenging the student to continually reach for a higher level of learning.

Another definition of student engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2011) refers to how involved or interested students appear to be in learning, and how students are connected to each other, the classes, and to institutions. The researchers emphasized that participation in learning activities by answering, asking, and formulating questions is integral to engagement. The researchers also emphasized that making education meaningful to each student should also be included as a component of student engagement.

Student engagement has been touted as a means of retention, as well as a learning mechanism (Southerland, 2011). Southerland argued that the components of cognitive,
affective, and psychomotor learning should be included in learning activities so as to stimulate the student and avoid disinterest and withdrawing from the learning environment. The researcher reported that student engagement must be grounded in learning activities that foster interest among all students, especially adults, since adults tend to have less persistence and need academic challenges that have meaning. Engagement allows the learner to be participant in the learning experience so as to acquire knowledge that is useful to the individual student.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted by the Indiana University Center of Postsecondary Research (Indiana University, 2010) defined student engagement as the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and to the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in activities. This definition encompasses components of the previously cited definitions and addresses the means by which education is delivered.

The NSSE (2010) also cited five benchmarks that foster student engagement. The first was the level of academic challenge. Students must earn an education, and thus require learning activities that are increasingly difficult. A student who is not challenged may view learning as mundane and become disinterested. The results of the survey revealed that an increased emphasis on creating challenging learning activities is necessary.

The second benchmark was active and collaborative learning. Students must be challenged to work with other academic departments. For example, nursing students might collaborate with performing arts students to play the part of patients during simulation activities. This is one example of how active and collaborative learning can
be addressed. The results of the survey indicated that collaborative learning is positively linked with higher levels of student involvement.

The third benchmark was student-faculty interaction. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) and Popkess (2010) stressed this aspect as crucial to facilitating student engagement. The degree to which faculty are involved with students as an individual learner may be crucial to fostering engagement not only with the faculty, but with other students, and the subject matter. This aspect of facilitating student engagement received low ratings largely due to time constraints of both parties.

Enriching educational experiences was the fourth benchmark. Creating learning activities and assignments that are interesting to the student and have meaning beyond the classroom are crucial to student engagement. Flexibility in designing an assignment and allowing student input into the design promotes engagement (Tomlinson, 2005).

The fifth and final benchmark of the study was a supportive campus environment. This is the aspect of student engagement that received the lowest rating and, therefore, must undergo significant improvement. Tutoring services, writing labs, and other academic assistance were deemed insufficient. The findings illustrate that student engagement is not limited to the physical classroom or virtual learning site. Student engagement does not end as one submits an assignment. It must be continually addressed by viewing the concept as a continuum in which responsibility for engagement rests on faculty, student, and campus resources.

Clearly, this study indicated that student engagement was beneficial to the students’ learning experience. Engagement is a key component of the learning process (NSSE, 2011). How students engage in learning is as varied as the students. Therefore, a
learning environment that incorporates learning assignments that allow students a degree of choice based on Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences may be instrumental in promoting greater student engagement. Also, using multiple intelligences may offer an adult learner the opportunity to apply a specific preference or intelligence. By employing intelligence(s) that a student possesses, a student may be more likely to embrace the assignment with interest and add personal experience to the learning activity (Gardner, 2011).
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Participants

Population and sample.

The population for this study was comprised of 181 RN-BSN students who had completed an associate of science degree in nursing or had graduated from a diploma nursing program. The population was enrolled in the RN-BSN completion program at the research site during 2011-2012. Students in the program were usually the first in the family to graduate with any type of post-secondary degree. Students in the program had at least a “C” average in prior college courses, and had completed the courses within the past five years. In addition to the preceding criteria, students met one or more of the criteria set forth by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010) in defining non-traditional/adult learners. A non-traditional student was defined as one who did not attend college shortly after high school graduation, worked 35 hours or more per week, had dependents other than a spouse, attended school on a part-time basis, was a single parent, or was financially independent as determined by financial aid criteria (NCES, 2010). The profile of the RN-BSN student was consistent with the criteria (Hankley, 2010). The population was overwhelmingly female (96%), maintained full-time employment (98%), and had one or more dependent children (90%) (Hankley, 2009-10).
From the population, a purposeful sample was taken. One goal of a purposeful sample is to achieve representativeness of the population and setting, if possible (Maxwell, 2005). A second goal of purposeful sampling is to ensure that data collected from the sample represents the range of variation within the group. Lastly, a purposeful sample is used to establish comparisons between settings and individuals of similar studies. Comparisons could be useful in future research involving multi-case studies and/or mixed-method research (Maxwell, 2005).

A subtype of purposeful sampling is homogeneous sampling (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Patton, 1990). Homogeneous purposeful sampling is used when an in-depth description of the group is necessary, as in this study, and usually involves bringing together participants with similar backgrounds and experiences (Patton, 1990). A homogeneous sample was appropriate for this study since all learners had commonalities. Students in the sample were non-traditional, adult learners with multiple stressors, who were pursuing a career in nursing with a desire to complete a baccalaureate degree.

The sample was represented by 21 (9%) female students, who were registered for NURN 416, a required nursing course in the RN-BSN program. According to statistics kept by the Key Advisor for the School of Nursing, only 3% of students enrolled in the entire RN-BSN program were male. All students were at least 18 or above, and the age range of the sample was from 25 to 54. Seven students were between the ages of 25 and 34. Eleven students were between the ages of 35 and 44. Four students were between the ages of 45 and 54.

Over two-thirds of the class, (15) persons, were married or had a significant other. Three class members reported that the extended family was their main source of
emotional support. All class members, with the exception of four students, had children. The average number of children was 2, and the age range of the students’ children was between 8 months and 24 years. One student had four children. Three students were responsible for caring for one or more elderly parents or extended family members.

Work commitments were a commonality among all members of the sample. Every student worked full time in the field of nursing. Full time was defined as 35 or more hours per week (NCES, 2010). Although the participants were financially independent in terms of daily living, 17 members were dependent upon employers for tuition reimbursement in order to complete the requirements for the BSN degree. Financial hardship and family needs were the main reason for not completing degree requirements in the RN-BSN program (Hankley, 2010).

Work experience in the field of nursing ranged from 2 years to 15 years. The majority of the participants had at least 5 years of experience in nursing. Eleven students had nursing experience in more than one area of practice.

The typical student in the RN-BSN program was motivated by personal goals of learning and job security (Hankley, 2011). Many students sought promotion and to further their careers by continuing education at the baccalaureate level and, eventually, the MSN level. Additional motivational factors included financial remuneration and meeting education requirements of a new job.

Given the characteristics of the non-traditional, adult learner, a profile of the average RN-BSN student in this sample was described as female, married or living with a significant other. The student most likely had two children who were dependents and
pursuing basic education. Finances were a concern, but her steady full-time employment as a nurse helped to alleviate daily financial expenses.

**Individual Participant Profiles**

A case study research design combines individual participant profiles into a general picture of the persons who volunteered to be involved in the research study (Yin, 2009). Individual participant profiles are appropriate when the researcher seeks to provide the consumer of research with a snapshot of the participants as part of the rich data that are synonymous with qualitative studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Table 1, Participant Profiles, which provides a brief overview of the 11 students who volunteered to participate in this study, was based on data obtained by the researcher during the initial class meeting. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of these participants.

Table 1

*Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>YEARS OF EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>AREA OF EXPERTISE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Geriatric Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cierra</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cardiac Critical Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medical-Surgical Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pediatrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Critical Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margie</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Obstetrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Neo-Natal Intensive Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Neuro-Spinal Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M'Lin</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cardiac Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oncology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faculty

The two faculty members that were included in this study were the course leader and the researcher. Both faculty members acted as participant observers. The course leader held a doctoral degree in adult and community education with a cognate in higher education. The course leader was an adjunct nursing faculty member with more than 30 years full-time teaching experience with traditional age nursing students and 9 years teaching experience with non-traditional, adult nursing students. The specialty of nursing practice focused on fundamental nursing courses and community health education. The course leader had knowledge of differentiated instruction and related teaching techniques. The course leader received additional orientation to the goal and purpose of this study as well as instruction regarding each differentiated instructional teaching technique to be used in the study.

The researcher was an instructor for this course. The researcher held a master’s degree in nursing education and had worked with adult learners for 19 years. The researcher possessed 16 years of teaching experience in RN-BSN programs at two universities. In addition, the researcher had utilized two of the differentiated instructional techniques with NURN 416 students in the previous year. The researcher also possessed 14 years of teaching experience in NURN 416 and was instrumental in the course’s development and periodic revisions.

Both faculty members operated as participant observers for the duration of the study. Participant observers assimilate into the role of “going native” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 18). “Going native” is defined as becoming part of the research study without interfering with the natural outcome of the study. Participant observers immerse
themselves into the research environment without altering key aspects of the research study. A key role of participant observers is to maintain the integrity of the study while interacting with study participants (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

For this study, both course faculty observed the students’ responses to differentiated instructional techniques while presenting content, participated in discussions both in-class and on-line, and provided guidance. The participant observers engaged in moderate participant observation. Moderate participant observation entailed being present at the scene of action, while serving in another role such as instructor or researcher. Participation was limited to observation, but the observer participated in the same activities as the participants on a limited basis (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

For the purpose of this study, the course leader and the researcher assisted students in designing tiered assignments. Faculty helped students focus on personal strengths that would enhance the assignment. In addition, the researcher observed the participants during the model building exercise. Interaction for this exercise consisted of providing instructions for the participants without intervening in their learning experience. The course leader participated in the literature circles by adding her insight to topics within the circles. The role of the participant observers in this case was to interact with students without interfering in the outcome of each assignment (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Course

NURN 416: Health Promotion Across the Lifespan, held from January 19 to March 8, 2012, was a senior level course for students enrolled in the RN-BSN program with the expectation of completing academic requirements for a baccalaureate degree in
nursing. In this course, students focused on wellness and promoting healthy behavior of clients who ranged in age from newborn to the older adult. Primary topics were nutrition counseling, stress management, exercise counseling, health screenings, holistic care, and 21st century healthcare. In addition to these areas, students explored the meaning and effect of health promotion within various age groups. Health education and goal setting were also included in the course.

NURN 416 is a hybrid course that is the first senior level course in the RN-BSN program. This 7-credit hour course was divided into three components: in class, online, and clinical sessions. In-class sessions were held 4 times within 8 weeks for a period of 4 hours each time on the following Thursdays: January 19, January 26, and February 2, and March 8, 2012. There were four online sessions conducted via the learning management system known as Academic Collaboration Environment (ACE) beginning on January 26 and ending on February 23, 2012. Students performed a total of 40 clinical hours in home settings with families who had members of three different developmental stages, ranging from infancy (0-18 months) to late adulthood (75 and older) (Edelman & Mandle, 2010). Students performed clinical hours in home settings with families who had met the project criteria for the course, as detailed in the NURN 416 course syllabus (Appendix A). Students worked independently on their projects and worked in small groups to complete other assigned course work.

The course was conceptually based on the principle of wellness, which was a broad topic conducive to personal interpretation and discussion. Most of the course content allowed the students to be creative and to rely on their personal strengths to complete course work. Content within the NURN 416 syllabus was described as
conceptual and abstract rather than concrete. Students in the past had commented positively on the amount of freedom to use their best skills when progressing through the course. Therefore, the choice of NURN 416 for the research study was based on the fit with the concept of differentiated instruction and freedom to tailor learning activities to meet individual learning styles without adjusting the curriculum and course objectives.

The model of differentiated instruction for this study was created to fit with the focus and design of content within NURN 416. A selection of differentiated instructional teaching techniques was utilized over the timeframe of 8 weeks designated for this course. Each technique was chosen because of the design of the differentiated instructional teaching technique and its ability to be modified in alignment with the course objectives. Students participated in learning activities of tiered assignment, model building, and literature circles in addition to traditional teaching methods. Student choice was used as the means by which each teaching technique was differentiated.

The three differentiated instructional techniques were chosen based on the nature of NURN 416. The course was focused on health promotion issues in nursing. Issues such as obesity in children, comparison of weight loss methods, healthy nutrition, and age-related developmental concerns were well-suited for discussion. Literature circles relied heavily on discussion of health promotion, as well as other related issues. Students posted entries to the on-line discussion that reflected the literature of research articles and/or the textbook. Students were free to express their views since many of the issues do not have a right or wrong answer.

Rationale for selection of literature circles as a differentiated instructional technique for the study was based on the design of a similar assignment currently in place
in NURN 416: Discussion Board. Accreditation guidelines and reasonable continuity of content and assignments between the different sections of NURN 416 in the RN-BSN program were maintained as per policy of the research site School of Nursing. Literature circles by the inherent structure of the teaching technique allowed students to use prior knowledge of discussion board assignments while incorporating additional procedures necessary to participate in the activity. Similarities between the NURN 416 Discussion Board format and the format of the Literature Circles used for the study involved student participation. Literature circles allowed for participants to assume different roles and to bring in different topics based on choice rather than a predetermined set of questions that required similar response.

Literature circles allowed each student to lead a small group, on-line discussion in which the role of leader rotated among all members. The topics of discussion were determined by students in conjunction with course objectives, textbook, and input from faculty. The literature circles took place in the virtual learning environment of at the research site. This technique was useful as a means of encouraging participation verbally, cognitively, and functionally. As groups chose new topics, students were free to engage in discussion in other forums as well. The key to this learning activity was to appeal to a student’s personal interest within a broad range of categories and to expand beyond that into higher-level thinking.

One of the differentiated teaching techniques chosen for the study was the tiered assignment. The rationale for selection of this technique was based on the same criteria as listed above regarding literature circles. The tiered assignment required limited modification of current course content and related course objectives, thus preserving the
degree of continuity of content and assignments required by the research site School of Nursing.

Students had two options. They could complete either a family health promotion project or a health promotion blog. The family health promotion project was already in existence in NURN 416. The assignment was based on Bloom’s Taxonomy in that each tier was progressive in difficulty, complexity, and requirement of advanced skills. The tiered assignment was adapted to the family health promotion project, but incorporated an element of choice as to the specific focus of the project.

The health promotion blog was a similar assignment with the same requirements as the family health promotion project. The blog included requirements that progressed in difficulty as based on Bloom’s new taxonomy. Students posted entries to their blogs that increased in complexity of content and skills.

The element of choice of tiered assignment, as well as the focus for the assignment, allowed students to incorporate basic principles of differentiation. Students chose which assignment fit preference, personal skills, and learning goals. Both assignments increased in complexity, according to the principles of Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom, et al., 1956), but included the newly revised taxonomy previously discussed. Students completed one phase of the project or blog and then progressed to the next stage after lower level course objectives were met for the assignment. This process continued until three phases of the project or blog were accomplished.

The tiered assignment also allowed students to use personal skills to create and complete the assignment. The skills were artistic, logical, technical, or any of the intelligences defined by Gardner (1983). As a vehicle for student engagement, tiered
assignments met individual needs by offering a choice and a chance to use personal skills and intelligences when participants designed the learning experience.

Model building is a differentiated instructional technique that had been used with great success in high school level education (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The choice of this technique for use in the study was based on content covered in the course. Models of health promotion were strongly emphasized throughout NURN 416 and were appropriate as topics for the model building activity. Several different types of health promotion models were presented via the textbook and literature. An in-class activity, such as model building, provided students the opportunity to incorporate Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and to utilize the top level of Bloom’s taxonomy by calling on individual skills of creativity. Model-building was chosen by the researcher because it was a differentiated instructional technique that contained Gardner and Bloom’s concepts. In addition, model building was chosen because it was most likely to be a unique type of learning activity that the students had not experienced in previous nursing classes.

NURN 416 contained material focused on a variety of nursing theories, health models, and models of clinical performance. The role of the student was to engage in the activity and complete a health promotion model based on contributions from each member of the small group. The role of the course leader and course faculty was to delineate the initial goal of the in-class exercise and not to interfere with the creative process of the students. Both faculty were permitted to answer a few basic questions about the activity in terms of time limitations, but did not answer questions regarding the substance or creative process.
Easel paper and markers were distributed to the students so that they could graphically display their model. In addition, students had access to blocks, balls, strings, and a multitude of other craft materials from which a model was constructed. This differentiated instructional technique required analytic, creative, and critical thinking skills. By allowing students to critique and create their models, the higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy were utilized as well as personal skills and intelligences. A timeline for implementation of each technique and other data collection is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Case Study Timeline of Participant and Researcher Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Organization of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1 1/19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to DI Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Building Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants and the researcher completed the activities listed in Table 2. Students were oriented to the study by the researcher during Week 1. Participants participated in the model building exercise during the first week of class. The researcher maintained field notes while observing the participants during the model-building exercise. A research journal and field notes were maintained throughout the study by the researcher. During the second week of the study, participants were oriented to the tiered assignment. Participants responded to literature circles during the third through the sixth week of the
course. The faculty interview and the focus group were completed during Weeks 7 and 8. Participants briefly presented tiered assignments during the last class session. Participants completed the open-ended questionnaire during the last week of class.

Table 3, below, provides an overview of participants in the study and the type of data that was obtained from each.

Table 3

*Individual Participant Contribution to Research Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Q* (6 rec’d)</th>
<th>FG</th>
<th>SJ* (3 rec’d)</th>
<th>TA</th>
<th>MB</th>
<th>LC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cierra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M’Lin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates that research data were submitted anonymously per study design and, as a result, the participant was unidentifiable.

X Indicates that participant provided data for the research study.

Q = Questionnaire       FG = Focus Group       SG = Student Journal
TA = Tiered Assignment  MB = Model Building   LC = Literature Circles

**Setting**

The setting for the research project was on the campus of a School of Nursing in a private, urban, liberal arts college located in the Midwest. The school is affiliated with a faith-based church organization. A variety of programs are offered from associate to doctoral degrees. Over 5,000 students are enrolled in programs on the main campus and study abroad locations.
The School of Nursing offers programs for the associate, baccalaureate, and master’s degree in nursing. The RN-BSN program, which allows students who possess an associate or diploma degree in nursing to continue their education by completing the last years of undergraduate nursing education, was the site for sample selection, as noted earlier.

In addition to the traditional face-to-face class sessions, the secondary setting for this study was the learning management system known as Academic Collaborative Environment (ACE). The differentiated instructional technique of literature circles was conducted via the discussion forum of ACE. All students had access to ACE, as did all faculty for the course. The ‘virtual’ site offered students a means of participation, was accessed asynchronously, and was treated with the same respect as the physical on-campus classroom. Both settings provided the proper environment to study the impact of differentiated instructional techniques on student engagement.

Research Design

The research study employed a case study method. Although individual students were the participants in this study, they were viewed as a composite of the entire class in order to create the research case study. Case study research is divided into three different types of case studies. The single instrumental case study is focused on a particular issue that affects an individual or a group that is viewed as one entity (Creswell, 2007). Another type of case study is the collective case study method. A single issue is chosen, but the researcher conducts multiple case studies to be used in the research (Yin, 2009). The third type of case study is the intrinsic case study in which the researcher focuses on the case itself. Examples of intrinsic case studies are evaluating a program that is
ineffective or studying a student having difficulty. The differentiating factor is that the aspect of focus is a small component of a larger problem (Creswell, 2007). For purposes of this study, single instrumental case study methodology was used. This method was justified in that student engagement was the focus and that individual participants were viewed as a whole.

According to Yin (2008), the case study method requires data to be collected in a manner that fosters a picture of participants’ experience with that which is being studied. The type of case study research was descriptive due to the nature of the circumstances and data collected. A case study approach must involve a particular context that frames the study, such as a particular course or a specific area of learning (Yin, 2008). For this study, the designated course was NURN 416, and the specific area of learning evolved from the use of differentiated instructional techniques.

The definition of a case study (Yin, 2009) that has been most frequently used is one that illuminates the “why” and the “how” and the results of one individual or individuals that are acting as one. In this study, it was the illumination of the “why” and the “how” from the sample of students enrolled in NURN 416. The intent of the “how” question was to obtain data of behaviors and attitudes of the participants from their perspective. An individual’s learning style is personal and may take many forms. Therefore, how one experienced a learning activity resulted in descriptive data that offered a true picture of the participant’s experience (Gardner, 2011). This approach was appropriate for use in a classroom of nursing students for whom the central goal of each was to obtain baccalaureate nursing education. All of the participants in the study were viewed as a unit (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The study illuminated how students
experienced differentiated instruction and uncovered the impact of using differentiated instructional techniques on student engagement.

The “why” question was critical to this case study research. This type of question allows the participant to analyze responses to the “how” question. The data received from this type of question provided a descriptive response that substantiated the participant’s experience (Yin, 2009). “Why” questions required a deeper level of analysis that revealed an in-depth perspective from the participant. The question of “how” differentiated instructional techniques had an impact on student engagement and the question of “why” differentiated instructional techniques had an impact on student engagement yielded a picture of the entire experience.

**Procedures**

Prior to initiating this study, the researcher contacted the Director of the BSN Program at the research site for permission to solicit participants from the RN-BSN track of the Baccalaureate of Nursing program. All student participants completed written consent forms in NURN 416, the course in which the study was conducted. The researcher provided an orientation session regarding differentiated instructional techniques for the students during the first class session on January 19, 2012. The purpose of the study was presented. The information session occurred during a regularly scheduled class session so that no additional time outside of class was required. Several students were absent from class on the night of the orientation, but the researcher contacted the students via email to solicit participation. The PowerPoint® presentation was sent to the students electronically along with the researcher’s contact information. A total of 11 of 21 (52%) students consented to participate in the study.
The consent form stated that participants consent to completing the questionnaire. Seven participants volunteered for the focus group, and two students volunteered to provide weekly journals. Students were informed that they had the right to refuse participation without encountering any consequences in terms of course grade. The researcher also informed the participants that the required course work took precedence over participating in the study. Participants were also informed that all responses were confidential and withdrawing from the study was always an option. Participants who chose to participate in the study received contact information for the researcher and the supervising chairperson. Consent forms distributed to the students were approved by the Ball State University Institutional Review Board and the research site Institutional Review Board. Data collection ended on March 8, 2012.

In order to avoid an appearance of coercion and to adhere to the research site Institutional Review Board request, the course leader graded all assignments that pertained to the study, not the researcher. Participants were informed of this fact during the orientation session for the study.

**Data Sources and Collection**

Descriptive qualitative studies, in order to collect a rich source of detailed data, use a wide array of sources (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Accordingly, an open-ended questionnaire, focus group, faculty interview, journals, observation/field notes, and documents, such as tiered assignments and literature circle responses were used.

**Open-ended questionnaire.**

An open-ended questionnaire was designed around the research questions so as to gain data that were full of rich detail and description and to place the reader directly into
the context of the environment to be studied (Yin, 2009). As recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “the interviewer’s questions were brief and simple (p. 134).” Six broad items to which all participants responded were identified:

1. In what ways did differentiated instruction affect your engagement in the course? Provide one specific, detailed illustration if possible.

2. In what ways did model building affect your engagement in the course? Provide one specific, detailed illustration if possible.

3. In what ways did the tiered assignment affect your engagement in the course? Provide one specific, detailed illustration if possible.

4. In what ways did literature circles affect your engagement in the course? Provide one specific, detailed illustration if possible.

5. Why do you think differentiated instructional techniques affected your engagement in the course as they did?

6. Any other comments regarding differentiated instructional techniques?

In developing the questionnaire, the items were examined by two independent reviewers, both university faculty, one of whom has more than 20 years of experience working with differentiated instruction, and the other with more than 30 years of experience in qualitative research. The research site nursing program director reviewed the questionnaire. In addition, it was also reviewed by two nursing faculty at the research site who were familiar with the content of the course. Finally, four former students who had taken the course reviewed the questionnaire and provided feedback. Thereafter, the questionnaire was finalized for use in the study.
The questionnaire was administered electronically to all participants in the study beginning March 1 to March 8, 2012 via ACE. Responses to the questionnaire were collected via Survey Monkey™. A response rate of 54% (6 of 11) was achieved. Participants received two electronic reminders to complete the survey, but no additional responses were received. Students reported that a very large assignment for the class following NURN 416 was received from the instructor of that course and that the amount of time and effort required to complete the assignment was a major factor in not completing the questionnaire.

**Focus group.**

A focus group was conducted by the researcher with seven participants who volunteered to provide data in addition to completing the questionnaire. Although experts state that eight to 10 persons should comprise the group, 7 of the 11 participants in the study were deemed sufficient for this study (Krueger, 2008).

The focus group guide mirrored the questions on the participant questionnaire, as shown below:

1. Tell me about your experience with tiered assignments.
2. Tell me about your experience with literature circles.
3. Tell me about your experience with model building.
4. How did the differentiated instructional techniques affect your engagement in NURN 416, as they did?
5. Why did differentiated instructional techniques affect your engagement in NURN 416, as they did?
The purpose of a focus group is to obtain data about a specific topic and to produce insight that may not be obtained from an individual alone (Morgan, 1993). Focus groups are used not only to obtain data, but to promote group interaction that produced the data (Krueger, 2008). In addition, focus groups are a means by which the researcher identifies themes and patterns in perceptions (Morgan, 1993).

While a pre-determined set of questions had been formulated for the focus group, it is important to note that this was simply a guide for discussion. Ideally, in a focus group, the participants influence the direction in which the conversation moves and, as a result a rich, detailed set of notes emerge.

However, it is also important to note that the researcher was prepared to intervene and encourage a more detailed, descriptive conversation, in the event that responses were too brief and lacked detail. The researcher had prepared a set of questions, in the event that this occurred. The questions were based on types of questions, including follow-up, probing, specifying, and direct questions, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

The researcher set ground rules for the focus group following introductions, reviewed the role of the moderator, and emphasized the statement of purpose and focus. Ground rules for participant conduct were as follows:

1. There are no right or wrong answers.
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. Participants must wait for a response from at least one other participant before commenting on the topic.
4. Listen respectfully.
5. Agree to disagree.

6. Talk to members of the focus group, not the moderator or assistant.

7. Turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices.

The ground rules were available to the participants in writing prior to the start of the focus group (Krueger, 2008). Each participant gave verbal consent to follow the ground rules.

The focus group was conducted on March 1, 2012 in the third floor conference room of the School of Nursing. A total of 1 hour and 20 minutes was utilized for the focus group. According to Yin (2009), this is considered an acceptable timeframe for a focused interview. The interview was taped via two digital recorders and Livescribe®. The researcher transcribed the event.

**Faculty interview.**

The course leader was interviewed by the researcher to obtain the faculty perspective on the level of student engagement resulting from differentiated instructional techniques. The faculty interview questions mirrored the questionnaire utilized with the participants:

1. Tell me about your experience, as course leader, with tiered assignments.

2. Tell me about your experience, as course leader, with literature circles.

3. Tell me about your experience, as course leader, with model building.

4. How did the differentiated instructional techniques affect your students’ engagement in NURN 416, as they did?

5. Why did differentiated instructional techniques affect your students’ engagement in NURN 416, as they did?
Due to scheduling conflicts, it was conducted in the researcher’s office on March 14, 2012 for a period of 50 minutes. As noted earlier, this was considered a standard time period for such an interview (Yin, 2009). The interview was transcribed by the researcher.

**Journals.**

Both the researcher and two participants maintained journals, “a popular data collection process in case studies” (Creswell, 2007, p. 141). The primary purpose for the use of journals was to promote critical self-reflection, but also to provide opportunities for participants to clarify their insights over time (Hiemstra, 2001). A total of two volunteers from the sample group agreed to maintain journals. Three 1-2 page journals were required from the participants. Each journal was focused on one of the three differentiated instructional techniques as directed by the researcher.

Participants recorded their thoughts every other week. The researcher sent out a set of questions that mirrored the study questionnaire and the focus group guide. The first journal questions pertained to the model-building exercise:


2. Why did the differentiated instructional technique of model-building impact your engagement in NURN 416? Cite examples.

The second journal questions pertained to literature circles:

1. How did the differentiated instructional technique of literature circles impact your engagement in NURN 416? Cite examples.
2. Why did the differentiated instructional technique of literature circles impact your engagement in NURN 416? Cite examples.

The final journal questions were focused on the tiered assignment:

1. How did the differentiated instructional technique of tiered assignment impact your engagement in NURN 416? Cite examples.

2. Why did the differentiated instructional technique of tiered assignment impact your engagement in NURN 416? Cite examples.

Participants were encouraged to document their impressions, reactions, and feelings in relation to differentiated instructional techniques and their engagement with these techniques. They were encouraged to make note of particular incidents and to list questions that came to mind in regard to the specific differentiated instructional technique determined by the researcher. Participants had the choice of maintaining their journals digitally or as hard copies, based on personal preference. Both participants chose to record entries digitally. Each participant received the questions that guided each of three journal entries via email. Questions mirrored the questions used for the focus group.

Journaling began on the first class meeting, January 19, 2012 and concluded on the next to last class meeting, March 1, 2012. The researcher received a total of three journal entries from two participants. The course leader received the journals. The course leader printed the journals and removed all personal identifiers prior to submitting the journals to the researcher. The researcher did not examine participant journals until all had been collected.
Participant observation.

The role of the participant observer is to spend concentrated, focused, and intensive time in integrated ways with participants, in order to gain a better understanding of their experiences from their point of view (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the participant observer recorded observations in the form of field notes, which were used later for data analysis purposes.

The researcher and the course leader acted as participant observers. Both attended all classes involving differentiated instructional techniques and monitoring literature circle discussion forums. The observations of the course leader informed the researcher’s understanding of the affect of differentiated instructional techniques and student engagement and served as a basis for her responses during the interview. Initial field notes taken by the researcher included brief descriptions of student behaviors and comments. In addition, the appearance of the classroom, interactions and relations among participants and participant observers were included (Seyfarth, 2006). Notes included date, time, and location of each session. Expanded field notes were more fully written and included the researcher’s thoughts, questions, and reflection about the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This set of field notes was added to the initial field notes and provided additional data as a result of reflection on the experience (Seyfarth, 2006). Questions that arose in relation to the sample differentiated instructional techniques, future research or other observations or thoughts were also noted.
**Documents.**

Four documents were relevant to this study: the course syllabus, the orientation for the research study, student products from the tiered assignments, and literature circles. Given that the course leader and the researcher were interacting with students throughout the course via email, it is possible that some of the exchanges had useful information to include as documents for analysis. Yin (2009) indicated that “the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). The documents accessible in this study were used to verify information, obtain specific details not readily available from other sources, and for making inferences. A summary of sources of data and data collection is shown in Table 4.
Table 4  

Data Collection Matrix of Sources of Evidence and Date, Origin, and Source of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Date of Collection</th>
<th>Origin of Evidence</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>March 2, 2012</td>
<td>Transcripts of interview</td>
<td>Course Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>January 19, 26 and February 2, 2012, Model Building</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Primary Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Products</td>
<td>February 3 – March 1, 2012, Literature Circles March 8, 2012, Tiered Assignments</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Primary Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>March 8, 2012</td>
<td>Transcripts of journals of participants and primary researcher</td>
<td>Participants (2) Primary Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>March 1, 2012</td>
<td>Transcripts of focus group response</td>
<td>Participants (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>March 8, 2012</td>
<td>Questionnaire Response</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>January 19, 2012</td>
<td>Syllabus Research study orientation Model Building Tiered assignments and literature circles</td>
<td>Primary Researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The array of data that emerged from the sources identified provided multiple layers of rich and detailed information. This is the depth of information considered important in a case study and required in order to provide a full and revealing picture of what is happening in an environment (Becker, 1970).

Validity and Reliability

Validity, as used in this study, refers to the “correctness or credibility of a description . . . [or] explanation . . . .” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). Methods for addressing issues of validity include those described by Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009). While
Creswell has recommended that at least two methods be used, the researcher used the following five:

1. *Prolonged and persistent observation in the field*: As described earlier, both the course leader and the researcher acted as participant observers. Contact was made with participants from the beginning of the course to the end and included not only face-to-face classroom meetings, but also web-based exchanges among the students. As Fetterman (1998) noted: “working with people day in and day out, for long periods of time, is what gives ethnographic research its validation and vitality” (p. 46).

2. *Triangulation, using data from multiple sources for corroborating evidence*: Data from the six sources of data collection--open-ended questionnaire, focus group, faculty interview, student journals, observation, and documents--were examined through a systematic data analysis process, described later, that allowed for careful comparison of themes, opportunities for revision, and identification of gaps in data. At least three iterations of this process were used.

3. *Peer review and debriefing*: The same two faculty mentioned earlier, who independently reviewed and provided feedback on the questionnaire, focus group and interview guide, served as peer reviewers, provided an “external check to the research process . . . asking hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Two debriefing sessions were conducted.

4. *Member checking*: As drafts of the narrative were developed, and after the research was completed, the course leader and participants were invited to review the work. The purpose was to take “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell,
Feedback was used to clarify, revise, and make the narrative more accurate and credible. Two participants chose to review the manuscript. No changes in content were made based on feedback from the participants.

5. **Rich, thick description:** The extensive, in-depth description of participants in the setting studied “allowed readers to make decisions about transferability” (Creswell, 2007, p. 2009). The narrative of participants’ engagement with differentiated instructional techniques, in this study, allowed readers to determine whether or not similar results were found in other similar settings.

6. **Trustworthiness:** Trustworthiness was established by constant comparison of researcher notes. Notes and data from students were continually reviewed for consistency of themes as well as consistency of avoiding biased thoughts on the part of the researcher.

   Reliability refers to “demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results” (Yin, 2009, p. 40). Yin wrote that “. . . every case study . . . should strive to develop a formal, presentable database, so that in principle, other investigators can review the evidence directly . . . . In this manner, a case study database markedly increased the reliability of the entire case study” (Yin, 2009, p. 119). From the beginning of the study, all data collected from the six sources--open-ended questionnaire, focus group, interview, journal, observation, and documents—were systematically organized, secured, and stored electronically. Results were scanned electronically, kept as PDFs, Excel spreadsheets, or audio files, as appropriate. Three copies of data were regularly updated and stored on USB flash drives and kept by the researcher and one of the two peer reviewers. The intent of this process
was to both secure data from loss and to make it readily accessible to the researcher in the event that original work was lost.

“A way to increase reliability is [by] maintain[ing] a chain of evidence” (Yin, 2009, p. 122). This concept required that one or more readers trace “the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions.” In other words, a reader should be able to follow the steps taken to arrive at the conclusions of the study by reviewing the case study report, examining the case study database and the “citations to specific evidentiary sources in the database,” studying the case study protocol—“overview of the project, field procedures, case study questions, outline or guide for the case study”—and the research questions. The same two faculty, who had already provided input concerning the questionnaire and focus group interview guide and participated in peer review and debriefing, served as readers.

**Data Analysis**

Common types of data analysis are holistic analysis and embedded analysis (Creswell, 2007). Holistic analysis was used to analyze data from the entire case study. Embedded analysis focuses on a specific aspect of the case study data. Holistic analysis was used for this study in the form of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). TCA was employed to analyze data from the participant questionnaire, participant focus group, participant observer interview, participant observer field notes, and student and researcher journals. This method of data analysis is appropriate in order to obtain a descriptive view of qualitative research in a textual form (Anderson, 2007). Integral to TCA was categorization of thematic content. Since the researcher intended to describe
the impact of differentiated instructional techniques on student engagement in terms of commonalities and themes, TCA was the most appropriate form of analysis to use.

The researcher reviewed all documents for common themes that directly reflected the participants’ response. Similar words or statements were placed in accordance with each other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Whenever possible the actual words used by the participants were preserved intact and interpretation was kept to a minimum (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Similar patterns and repeating themes were constructed from the all types of data collected for this study. Each pattern, word, or theme was coded according to the source. For example, a code of 2-7 indicated that the source of the unit was from Interview #2 and line number 7 of text. Units were subdivided into thematic categories. Units and categories were revised or redistributed as necessary. The number of times that a word, theme, or pattern was found in the data were also documented. This process was repeated until the researcher was satisfied that the units and categories reflected the textual data and a clear description of the theme was derived (Anderson, 2007).

The order of analysis was in the order that data were received. The researcher analyzed data from the participant observers first. Interviews, documents, focus group transcripts and journals followed. The response to the questionnaire was analyzed last.

A composite of the steps of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) follows. The first step of data analysis was to make multiple copies of all the types of data collected (Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 2007), including participant questionnaires, participant observer interview transcripts, researcher’s field notes, focus group transcripts, participant weekly journals, and the primary researcher’s journals.
The second step was to highlight descriptions that were relevant to the topic. From the highlighted areas, the researcher proceeded to the third step, which required marking each unit of meaning that is relevant to the study. Yin (2009) recommended that it is better to have too many units of meaning than too few, so that there will be a connection between the units and the overall topic.

The third step was to put similar units into separate sections and code each unit by source. For example, 1-16 for interview #1, page 16. Then each section was labeled with themes or key words and categories were revised, as the analysis progresses (Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 2007). If information was missing from the data, gaps were identified by categories.

The next step was to read through all units per category and redistribute units if necessary. At this point, categories were divided or collapsed, as appropriate. After a few days, the original text documents were reread. Then, units were reread and categories relabeled, if needed. Then, the number of categories were considered, in terms of whether there were too many or enough, to cover the topic. When all TCA procedures were completed, each category was reread, separately. Then, all categories from all data were combined and categories that were similar were revised (Yin, 2009).

Finally, the total categories were reread and a determination was made as to whether there were an appropriate number of categories to make sense of the data. The researcher continued to return to the first step and revisit each step of the TCA process, until satisfied that the categories reflected the data as a whole. A minimum of three iterations was completed. At that point, the researcher believed that the categories offered
an accurate picture of the data. The process of data analysis was concluded as saturation was obtained.

Although the standard process of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was detailed in the research proposal, the primary researcher performed the second step and third step of TCA in reverse order. This change occurred with consultation of the dissertation committee chair and a noted expert in the field of differentiated instruction at a meeting on June 27, 2012. Rationale for this change was that the data were more manageable in terms of comprehension and that the researcher was able to more clearly delineate common themes and relevant sub-themes evident in the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Findings of the study were taken from researcher field notes obtained during the model building exercise, transcript of the faculty interview, focus group transcript, tiered assignments, student journals, open-ended questionnaire, and literature circles. Themes were derived using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). Five themes emerged from the data: valuing the student, framing, learning environment, non-traditional teaching techniques, and behaviors of engagement. A composite of major themes and subthemes is shown in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Common Themes and Subthemes.
Additional analysis was performed on each theme resulting in the creation of subthemes. Five subthemes evident within the first theme, valuing the student, were personhood, voice, self-awareness, choice, and skills related to Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences. Framing, the second theme, was comprised of the subthemes of making meaning and context. The learning environment, third theme, was composed of subthemes of safe, freedom, structure, and forced engagement. The theme of non-traditional teaching techniques was composed of “out-of-the-box” thinking, control over learning, and self-directed learning. From the fifth and final theme, behaviors of engagement, emerged subthemes of enjoyment, accountability, ownership, motivation, and creativity. Chapter Four contains the data supporting each theme and discussion of the subthemes and the impact on student engagement.

The process by which data were derived from research documents is included here in order to more fully understand the evolution of themes and subthemes. In addition, a brief synopsis of actual data components is included. The response rate of the open-ended questionnaire was 6 of 11 completed for a total of 54% of participants responded. The focus group consisted of seven participants. This was greater than original expectations of five to six participants. Student journal response was a total of three journals submitted to the researcher. This response was less than the anticipated level of three journals per three participants for a total of nine journals. Participation in the model-building exercise was 100%, as was participation in the literature circles and tiered assignments. A summary of the number of references to the subthemes of each
major theme is provided as additional support for the final version of common themes and subthemes of the study.

**Evolution of Findings (Common Themes and Subthemes)**

The final version of common themes and subthemes that eventually emerged from the data required two major revisions prior to accepting the third version of the five common themes of the study. During the first and second stages of the major revisions, subthemes were redistributed in accord with the associated major theme. This portion of the evolutionary process occurred because the researcher was satisfied with the alignment of themes and subthemes at this point.

The subthemes were reorganized and revised during the third and final stage of review. Revisions consisted of combining thematic content, eliminating thematic content that was not clearly and consistently occurring throughout the data, inserting a new theme or subtheme that took precedence and prominence over a previously identified theme, and comparing each component for similarities or dissimilarities in order to be placed in a specific category. This process of evolution, in some cases, required elimination and/or creation of major themes and subthemes.

As the review of data for thematic content continued during each stage of revision, additional support was deemed necessary in order to describe themes and subthemes. Themes were more clearly defined by the researcher’s concept of the theme, noted theorists pertinent to the topic, and/or selected published authors whose work entailed components of emerging themes. After all stages of review and revision were completed, the final version of findings of the study previously was determined.
The first version of findings for the study is listed in Figure 2. Initial findings revealed seven major themes with selected subthemes. Figure 2 is a composite of the result of the first stage of evolutionary findings.

*Figure 2. Common Themes Version 1.*
Subthemes were not incorporated into Version 1, but were identified by the researcher. Personalization was created as a theme and supported by the data pertaining to personal interest, experience, and opinion. The theme of non-traditional teaching techniques was supported by the subthemes of newness, self-direction, and “out-of-the-box” thinking. Learning environment was associated with subthemes of comfort, safety, freedom, and structure. The theme of behaviors of engagement was comprised of fun, accountability creativity, motivation, and ownership. The value of the student was evident in the initial findings and related subthemes were having a voice, self-awareness, skills, multiple intelligences (identified by specific type of intelligence), talents, and strengths. Choice was a common theme with no additional subthemes identified by the researcher. The last theme identified was making meaning. Making meaning consisted of framing and context as subthemes due to the similar characteristics embodied in each concept. A more detailed description and explanation of themes and subthemes was included in the final version of common themes and subthemes.

The second stage of evolution of common themes and subthemes involved a revision of the graphic representation of the themes. Seven themes were condensed to five overall themes due to similarities of themes. Version 2 of the findings represents the revisions made as categories of each theme were condensed and/or renamed as necessary to capture the proper intent of the research data (Figure 3).
Revisions made to Version 2 included placing the theme of choice into the major theme of value of the student. This occurred because of research that indicated that allowing choice demonstrated confidence, trust, and value in the student’s ability to make a decision about education (Knowles, 1984). Other revisions included placing personalization under the major theme of value of the student. This decision was based on the premise that the unique qualities of an individual student enhance learning.
(Brookfield, 1990). Additional changes were made during the third and final evolutionary stage.

Figure 1 denotes the final revisions and working copy of common themes and subthemes that served as the research findings for the study. The major themes remained largely unchanged from the second stage with the exceptions of Value of the Student and Making Meaning. Value of the Student was revised to Valuing the Student. It was decided that the verb ‘valuing’ indicated an active process requiring engagement by both the faculty and student. ‘Value’ of the student, was perceived by the researcher to indicate a title or descriptor, albeit a positive one, that did not involve an active process.

In terms of subthemes, modifications were necessary to condense and/or eliminate concepts that were quite similar. Personalization as noted in Version 2 was eliminated and personhood was inserted to encompass the concepts of interest, experience, and opinion previously identified. One hundred and sixty-nine references to personhood and its components were found in the data.

Another change to subthemes involved combining the concept of personal skills and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. Participants referred to their personal skills as intelligences following the study orientation that occurred during the first night of the course. The researcher chose to combine personal skills with Gardener’s multiple intelligences and eliminate the concepts of talents and strengths. This occurred because strengths and talents were mentioned in the definition of intelligences (Gardner, 1993). Forty-three references supporting this subtheme were found in the research data.

The subtheme of self-awareness was specifically defined by four students in the data as being related to knowing one’s limits and strengths. This subtheme remained in
the original category without revision. Twenty-nine references to self-awareness were found in the research data.

Voice, as a subtheme of valuing the student, also remained unchanged. A total of 48 references to voice were found in the data. Participants cited voice as being valuable for a student, in terms of acknowledging the student perspective (Researcher, Researcher Notes, March, 2010).

The themes of making meaning and related subthemes were reorganized. The main theme became ‘framing’ which was consistent with the theory of Mezirow (1998) in which the framework of the experience becomes the basis on which meaning is made and context is necessary for clarification. Therefore, context and making meaning became the subthemes for the category. Making meaning was referenced 36 times in the data, and context was found 29 times in the research data.

The subthemes associated with learning environment were revised in two ways. Comfort was eliminated as a specific subtheme, and the term was incorporated into the researcher’s definition of safety. A total of 27 references to the subtheme were evident in the research data.

Freedom was established as a subtheme due to the number of references in the research data. Thirty-one remarks were determined by the researcher as appropriate for inclusion in the theme of learning environment.

Structure was a subtheme that remained consistent throughout the analysis of findings. Structure of the course and the assignments contributed to the learning environment and student engagement. Based on data from the questionnaires, journals,
field notes, and other forms of data, structure of the learning environment was referenced a total of 31 times.

One new subtheme was placed in the main category of Learning Environment. This was ‘forced engagement.’ Forced engagement was cited specifically 12 times in the research data. Forced engagement, as defined by the participants in the focus group, was any form of participation in the course that was required as part of the course grade or professional conduct (Study Participants, Focus Group, 2012). The researcher placed this subtheme in this category since it was mentioned in the context of a discussion involving the learning environment.

The theme of Non-Traditional Teaching Techniques was established as a main category due to a large amount of data supported by the subthemes. “Out-of-the-Box” thinking, control over learning, and self-directed learning were subthemes evident in the research data. Participants coined the phrase “out-of-the-box” thinking in lieu of using ‘newness’ as had been previously identified in an earlier version of common themes. Participants made reference to this subtheme 21 times.

The subtheme of control over learning emerged from the data as pertaining to non-traditional teaching techniques. Control was a finding that positively influenced student engagement. Thirty-six responses from all data forms identified control as a key component of non-traditional teaching.

Self-directed learning was the last subtheme included in the final version of common themes for the study that pertained to non-traditional teaching techniques. A total of 18 references to this subtheme were found in the data. A more detailed
description of the subtheme is found in the section containing a discussion of the subtheme.

The last theme evident in the findings was behaviors of engagement. Aside from reordering the subthemes, the only revision made in the third and final version was to substitute enjoyment for the subtheme of ‘fun.’ This change was made at the discretion of the researcher due to a personal preference for the term ‘enjoyment.’ The researcher notes, taken during the model-building exercise, revealed that ‘fun’ or ‘enjoyment’ was used 64 times by various participants.

Accountability was a subtheme that remained consistent throughout the evolutionary process. A total of 30 references to this subtheme were evident in the data. Definitions and support for accountability as a subtheme occurs later in this chapter.

Ownership as a subtheme of behaviors of engagement was defined by the researcher as a sense of belonging, responsibility, or pride in having legal entitlement over an entity, physical or intellectual property, or emotional domain. The subtheme was evident in 27 references found in the data.

Another subtheme related to behaviors of engagement was motivation. Notes taken by the researcher during the study orientation revealed that participants made reference to motivation or motivational factors 41 times. Definitions and additional supporting data are detailed in the section specific to this subtheme.

The last subtheme associated with behavior of engagement was the most popular one. Ninety-one references to creativity were obtained from all forms of research data from the study. Creativity was one of the subthemes that remained consistent throughout the evolution of the study findings.
As additional support and clarification for the final version of common themes and subthemes of the study, a summary table of the number of references per subtheme is listed in Table 5. Numbers in parentheses listed under the main theme title were the total number of responses from all subthemes in that category. Numbers were taken from all forms of data.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of References per Subthemes and Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuing the Student (288)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills/Gardner’s MI (43)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme One: Valuing the Student**

The first theme to emerge from the data was that students felt valued when differentiated instructional techniques were employed. Valuing the student, as defined by the researcher, was incorporating the student’s perspective and placing a degree of
importance on it equal to the importance of the views of faculty, other students, and experts from the text and other resources. Student engagement was positively affected by allowing students to incorporate personal interest, experiences, and opinions. Model-building, tiered assignments and literature circles were structured to allow for the components of personhood to be included. Subthemes were also evident in the findings and served to support the major category of valuing the student as a means of promoting student engagement. Subthemes identified by the researcher were personhood, voice of the student, self awareness, choice, skills and multiple intelligences.

**Personhood.**

Personhood, as defined by the researcher, was composed of personal interest, experience, and opinion. This subtheme includes the student’s unique view of events that have occurred and the individual perspective that is inherent to one’s preferences. Findings that support personhood via interest, experience, and opinion, as a subtheme were evident in student journals, questionnaire, field notes, faculty interview, literature circles, tiered assignment, and focus group transcript.

Data gleaned from one of the student journals indicated that the participant felt that her opinion was respected and contributed to the class discussion. She wrote:

*I really liked the model-building exercise because I was able to put in my thoughts and my feelings about what I would include in a health promotion model! This was great! No penalties if the model didn’t look like Neuman’s or anyone else. If I can bring myself into the assignment, I will be much more involved* (Study Participant, Student Journal, February, 2012).
The participant’s comments indicate that her perspective or opinion of a health promotion model was valued and, therefore, her engagement in the class activity was improved.

Additional forms of data supplied by other study participants echoed the thoughts found in the student journal. The following remarks support the subtheme of personhood as being an important catalyst for student engagement. M’Lin stated, while working on the model-building exercise, “WE don’t have to spit out the book models, WE can put what WE think of into the model” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Lisa stated, during the debriefing component of the model-building exercise:

*It is about time that somebody lets us be the creator. What is the value in learning the same theories over and over? I got it the first time. Now I can be the theorist. I have an opinion that gets some airtime* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

Jill responded to Lisa’s remarks with comments of support for being able to include personal perspective, a component of personhood, into the model-building exercise.

*I agree with Lisa. It is nice to get a chance to create something that is all me and not just a copy of the usual health promotion models. I was much more involved with this type of group work* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

Four responses from the open-ended questionnaire also supported personhood as having a positive impact on engagement. Being able to connect the learning activity with personal interest or experience was evident in the remarks from the participants. The following excerpts from the focus group transcript reflect the premise that the participants
welcomed the opportunity to integrate their experience, interest, and opinion into the learning environment and, in turn, student engagement reaped the benefit. 

*I can really get into whatever it is that I am asked to do in class if I can relate it to something that I know. I work in a specialty of nursing that most nurses do not know exists. I can use what I do to add to whatever discussions we might have. Letting us use things or whatever we find important makes me feel that there is respect for how far I have come since I left this school at graduation. My participation was very different because I could make connections between what I know or what I have seen in nursing and what other students were experiencing* (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

The remarks support the components of personhood as having a positive impact on non-traditional, adult student engagement.

A total of 24 statements made by the participants and documented by the researcher during the model-building session also indicated that many of the students were pleased and eager to include personal interest and perspective into the group’s model as a means of valuing the students’ contribution. A selection of comments documented by the researcher during the model-building session follows. Sheila stated: “I want to emphasize exercise in our model because that’s what I am into” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Kathy offered: “Let’s create something based on age groups because I don’t want to exclude anyone. I know that the elderly don’t get enough attention. I see it all the time” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Betty said: “Now I’m interested. It is so nice and such a breath of fresh air to put what I think is
important into the model. Makes it much more real to me” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Remarks of this nature provided support for personal opinions and experiences as well as the main theme of valuing the student as a key factor in promoting positive student engagement.

The researcher’s journal provided additional support for including personhood as a component of learning activities so as to give the student a forum in which he/she could bring a part of self to the classroom and maintain focus. Five of nine pages were devoted to how students were highly focused on the model building activity and did not divert from it. The following excerpts from the journal reflect the researcher perspective.

*I see all the groups working very hard, some laughing, some appear very intense, but no one is distracted or sitting back passively. Every student is participating by adding comments, working on a component of the model, gathering supplies, or sketching the format of their model. No one is talking on a phone or using some type of electronic device. Everyone is engaged! Everyone is focused.*


The course leader also echoed this sentiment and provided further clarification of its value in terms of the research study.

*I was absolutely shocked at how intent they were with the health promotion model activity! Nobody seems bored or acted like it was forced labor. I say no one and that is exactly what I mean. None were having conversations that had nothing to do with the class. No cell phone came out or rang, for that matter!

They worked on the model the entire time. I haven’t had that happen in all of my
years of teaching! I know that there isn’t anything quantifiable about this observation so I don’t think that it is truly scientific, but there is something about using differentiated instruction and this type of learning activity that should be considered in the future (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Although this particular observation did not contain rigorous scientific method, it merits inclusion in the study as a piece of data to be compared and contrasted with other learning experiences in order to give a degree of perspective. Additional remarks that support personhood, as a factor having an impact on student engagement, included:

The students seem to be excited by putting themselves into the model. As I circulate the room, I hear one student giving a personal opinion and another student agreeing and offering her opinion. All are very intense. No one notices me walking around them (Researcher, Researcher Journal, January, 2012).

The perspective of the course leader was a source of support for the subtheme of personhood and, ultimately, valuing the student as a vehicle for positively affecting non-traditional, adult student engagement. During an interview conducted by the researcher, the course leader offered these comments in regard to her observations during the model-building exercise.

I was amazed at how serious and focused and intense they all were. At first, I was not sure, because they had those blank faces that said just tell me what to do and I will do it, but with that little bit of clarification that you gave, it all changed. It was hard for them to realize that THEY were in charge and THEY were creating the model. I think that they were used to simply repeating what has already been
done. Once they started talking about their own personal likes and dislikes AND they closed the textbook. Key point there. The students realized that what they brought to the table was OK and expected. That is probably a new thing to most of them, but they remained on task and did not get side-tracked. Let me be me or, I should say, them be them and they took off. It was obvious that personal interest, experience, etc., made them so much more open to being involved than if it were just the usual repeat of an already established health promotion model (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The course leader offered additional remarks that not only made connections with her previous comment, but also supported personhood in conjunction with student engagement.

This class was pretty typical of an RN-BSN class. They are tired since most come directly from work. They are juggling family, home, work, children, and then school on top of everything. It is very difficult to get them to focus during an evening class, but this was remarkable. I believe that the students felt confident that they didn’t have to go searching in a book right away for what they needed for the model. The big factor was that you gave them that unspoken credit for having work experience and life experience and individual experience to contribute to the activity. I think that made all the difference (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).
One definitive comment was made by a participant, who completed the open-ended questionnaire:

_I like this because I get to be part of it, and we are creating something new that has my mark on it. I, or we, as a group, get to make something that no one else could possibly have. Look at the way we put it together. Here is (group member name) right here, and here is (group member name) right here, and so on. If you know any of us, you know that this is a model of us as people. People! Not just another number! I like having me, as a person, taken into consideration instead of all the attention that Florence [Nightingale] or Orem gets. It makes me feel like I matter_ (Study Participant, Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Personal interest, experience, and opinion were also evident in the tiered assignment and literature circles. Nine of eleven participants chose blogs for the tiered assignment. In addition, the participant chose the main topic of each blog. All blogs were based on personal experience and personal interest as it pertained to health promotion. Personal opinions were evident in the content that was frequently posted. The course leader echoed this premise by stating:

_As I discussed the tiered assignment with each student, I found that everyone was doing something that had personal importance. One was very interested in fitness. Another was going on a mission trip and wanted to do a blog about health promotion in another country. One student told me that it was the first time that knowledge that she had accumulated since graduating from an ASN program was valued. She also said that it was important for her life experiences_
to be included in her work for the class (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

On the same note, a related piece of data from the researcher’s journal mirrored the remark of the course leader:

As I look at the tiered assignments, both blogs and family assessment, I can almost guess the identity of the author if I had not already known it. One of the blogs is a fitness-focused blog for those who have had back surgery, injuries, or chronic disease. I know that it was Jill’s blog because she included lots of personal experience that she has also shared in class. There was a passion and a definite feeling that the blogger knew the topic well and had experience to back it up. It came through in the entries posted. The same was true of each of the tiered assignments (Researcher, Researcher Journal, March, 2012).

These remarks were supported by similar comments from study participants who had completed the open-ended questionnaire. Each participant cited that having personal input into an assignment was important for having a positive effect on engagement.

Usually I do an assignment so that it is just like everyone’s, because that is the expectation. It was great to do an assignment that I designed. I met the course requirements, but I felt that I met my requirements, too (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Another comment from the open-ended questionnaire provided additional support for personhood.
I was able to include me in this project. That made me feel like I was a part of the project. Like I was doing this WITH the content of the project (me) and not just doing things TO the content (other source) of the project. That was what made me want to do more than I had to do for the class (Study Participant, Open-Ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

This remark strongly supported personhood as having a positive impact on adult student engagement.

In addition to the observations of the course leader and study participants, the researcher made positive connections between personal focus and the number of entries and participation that each student put into the tiered assignment. A total of 20 entries were required in order to meet the expectations for the tiered assignment (NURN 416 Course Syllabus, 2012). The average number of entries to either the blog or family assessment forum for study participants was 29 entries.

I could see the enthusiasm in their faces and the excitement when we first discussed the assignments for tiered assignments and literature circles. When I read the blogs or the literature circle postings, I found that greater personal input from the student resulted in a more detailed and interesting posting. This was consistent regardless of the type of DI assignment. Students also posted more entries than they were required to do (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

A participant offered the following comments that served to support the remarks listed above and to clarify why there was an increase in the number of postings. “I found that
when I put more of me into the blog, I wanted to increase the number of blogs just because I believed that I mattered” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). Another participant stated during the focus group, “It was such an interesting project that I wanted to read more and post more. Everything seemed to be so personal to each one of us so I learned more” (Cierra, Focus Group, March, 2012).

In addition, comments from the focus group provided additional support for the theme of personhood by repeatedly emphasizing the participant’s appreciation for providing a learning experience that was created specifically to incorporate the interest, experience, and opinions of the individual.

I was so glad to do the work in this class because I felt like I was appreciated. I wasn’t spitting out whatever some expert said. I got to include me just as if I am an expert! You know, we [gestures to the group] graduated anywhere from 2 to 20+ years ago with our first degree in nursing and we have learned so much in that time. I love coming to this class because I have an impact on what happens here (Kathy, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Apparently, the participant found that the components of personhood were integral to increasing participation and learning by allowing for the individuals to apply knowledge to their own lives. Another student reiterated the same sentiment, but added a note of clarification desiring to have more classes incorporate the techniques associated with differentiated instructional, unless outside governing bodies and other extenuating circumstances may prevent its use.
Little old me seemed important right from the start and I felt that what I have to offer is a huge piece of this class, especially with the blog and the literature circles. I don’t mean to belittle any prior degrees, but this was not done before in any college work that I can remember. I understand that it might be different when you have to gear education to passing the NCLEX® (M’Lin, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Pam, during the focus group mirrored the thoughts above, but also provided support for personhood and engagement.

I think that when a certification exam is in the picture, things are different. Everybody must have the same knowledge so personal experience is OK, but it is not standardized. However, there are many ways to get to the same point. That is what we did here, but we are already past the certification exam so there are no worries there. Bringing in anything that is personal is the equivalent to making it live and that will increase participation in a class. I think that the State Board needs to find a way to let us be us and still learn something (Pam, Focus Group, March, 2012).

The course leader provided support for tiered assignments and literature circles as a means of using personhood to increase student engagement.

Nearly every time I had any contact with students whether it was email, phone, or face-to-face, someone made reference to how much the individual was taken into consideration. This was quite prominent with the tiered assignments and the literature circles. They were able to choose something of interest to focus on for
the tiered assignment so each student was able to tell me why in support of their choice. Invariably, a student would give rationale for the choice by providing an example of a patient issue or a particular preference. I think that allowing room for putting the individual student at the center of decision-making for lit circles and blogs made the students really want to be involved. I think that it really supported engagement in the course. Remarks such as ‘I love being this involved in the outcome of my work’ and ‘My 10 years of nursing experience and my personal interest seemed to be the focus of the course in some way. I feel like I have an impact on what I learn and what others learn because I can put in all of the personal stuff that makes me be me (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Additional responses supporting personhood as a vehicle for enhancing student engagement were derived from the open-ended questionnaire. Participants responded that personal opinion and interest helped the participant be more focused on the work of the course. All questionnaires, but one, contained comments indicating that participation or engagement increased as a result of including the student viewpoint. Five study participants indicated that it was nice to be important as a human being. The following is a compilation of comments from the five participants.

Nice to be able to be me and not be penalized for including personal things. I felt like I needed to make comments in class because I had a different experience than some of the others and they could learn from me. What a breath of fresh air! I know that this was one of the things that made me want to participate instead of
being the very quiet person that I usually am when it comes to class discussions.

(Study Participants, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

The subtheme of personhood and its components of personal interest, experience, and opinion were reflected in the data as having a positive impact on student engagement.

Voice.

The second subtheme related to personhood was voice. Voice, as defined by the researcher, is student input that is heard and acknowledged as important by others in the learning environment. The voice of the non-traditional/adult learner is a critical vehicle for opening up lines of communication as well as conveying the unique perspective of the student. Accepting the voice of the student as a key component of engagement is critical to improving student engagement. Voice is closely related to personhood in that both subthemes require respect for others in the learning environment along with self. Focus group transcript, faculty interview, tiered assignments, and the open-ended questionnaires contained many references to voice, and subsequently, were utilized as a foundation for delineating this concept as a subtheme.

Remarks from the focus group participants contained references to having a voice and emphasized that this subtheme was closely linked to personhood. Sheila stated:

*I loved having a voice that was not criticized or cut and pasted to fit some textbook standard view of a health promotion issue. I felt that I could make some controversial statements that may not be very popular, shall I say, with the entire group. I felt that my voice was heard and respected the first night of class, every*
time I posted to the lit circles and to the blogs (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Also emphasizing the importance of voice in conjunction with engagement was focus group participant, Kathy. Her remarks pertained specifically to the literature circles, but provide similar support for voice as a factor affecting student engagement.

At first, I was very unsure and timid when participating in the literature circles, but I relaxed when I saw that we were all acting like mature adults and different opinions were just part of the circle. I think that I started posting more responses that had my opinion in it. I didn’t worry about being too bold because I felt that my voice was just as important as anyone’s voice (Kathy, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant, Margie, acknowledged Kathy’s thoughts and provided this response that demonstrated how her engagement was positively influenced by having a voice.

I liked having my own voice that did not have to be just like everybody or just like the textbook. I hesitated to put some of my thoughts into our lit circle, but I read some of the other circles and decided that it was OK to say what I felt. It was great to be able to put my opinions into a class assignment. I got used to the whole thing and ended up making more than the number of posts required. It was fun (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

One study participant reported that she wanted to continue her blog because it was satisfying to receive responses that acknowledged her voice at the same level as others.
I will continue my blog for a while because it is my connection to others.

Whenever I received a response, it made me think that I was important and respected, plus it was interesting to see what they had to say. It was nice to know that I was on the same level with everyone else, not just classmates, but anyone in the class. I think that the way the class was designed made it so easy to be heard.

Not just responding to someone’s questions or a pre-set agenda, but we kinda decided what we would do. That alone will increase my participation or should I say engagement (M’Lin, Focus Group, March, 2012).

This premise was echoed by the response from Cierra who indicated that knowing there was respect for the voice of the student that was equal to others in the learning environment made her eager to participate.

I was so comfortable posting in the lit circles that I could not wait to read what was posted each day. After seeing how much that we [the class] could use our own opinions when we did the model exercise, I just posted to the circle based on what I had to say and felt good about it. Sure, we had the assigned chapters in the book, but I got to choose a topic from those chapters that I was interested in.

What a great way to learn! I know that I posted more that I had to, but it was just so interesting to see what everyone had to say instead of repeating the book (Cierra, Focus Group, March 2012).

Pam responded to Cierra’s remarks by stating:

I understand what you mean. I am so tired of following the book. I have a brain too! Every class I take we follow the book. The discussions and answers to
questions are just the same thing over and over again. There is no dimension. I mean that it is flat. Nothing to give the material life until you bring in your life, your work, or anything that you have been through that applies to the topic. Then it comes alive. That is when you make the subject matter live. Maybe even 3-D! That is what I think happens when I have a voice. School takes shape. School is more important to me. I was able to speak out about the things that had meaning to me and that is what made me speak up in class more (Pam, Focus Group, March, 2012).

The importance of having a voice was evident in the data, and the response from the participants indicated that a positive impact on student engagement occurred.

The course leader also provided insight that supported the subtheme of student voice as part of the overall theme of valuing the student.

I found that students started out posting to either the blog or literature circles very tentatively, but when comfortable and they felt accepted, they really blossomed. I saw one group that seemed to be shy in terms of all members, grow into a group of people who had some very definite opinions and were not afraid to show it! In fact, I had several students email me that this was the best way to discuss issues or present health promotion information without worrying about whether or not they made mistakes. The students knew that they had the approval of faculty. Students said, in class, that having a voice made them feel valued and appreciated for who they are. Although participation in the lit circles and the tiered assignment was mandatory, the students didn’t seem to be affected by this.
Usually some students will post a perfunctory response just to get the minimal amount of points in order to pass the course. Students appeared to enjoy having a voice and “talking” to each other. They asked each other some very detailed questions that sparked some discussions that were some of the best exchanges of ideas that I have seen in a long time (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The thoughts of the course leader clearly mirrored the data from the study participants and provided additional support for voice as a subtheme of valuing the student.

Blogs of nine study participants had postings that included appreciation to faculty for allowing their voice to be heard, which in turn, became data that supported the subtheme of voice. One of the nine participants posted the following response in the final posting required for the course.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to (course leader and primary researcher names) for allowing me to have a platform on which to express myself. I appreciate the opportunity to be a voice for those who are afflicted with osteoporosis. Gratitude to all who listened and responded to my blog (Margie, Tiered Assignment – Blog, March, 2012).

This thought was echoed by another participant who supported all of the data previously cited as pertaining to voice of the student.

I am so thankful that you allowed me to be heard. To all who participated in my blog, I thank you so much for letting me come into your lives and make connections with you. It is so important to be heard by others. Never
underestimate the value of listening to another human being whether it be face-to-face or via electronic media. One’s voice is the expression of the soul. Thank you for hearing and acknowledging mine (Mia, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

**Self-awareness.**

The third subtheme that emerged was the concept of self-awareness. Gardner (1993) defined self-awareness as knowing personal limitations, needs, boundaries and abilities in relation to the task at hand. For example, a student may assess skills necessary to complete a task or assignment in relation to the skills and limitations possessed. Evidence that supports this subtheme was derived from researcher notes, focus group, field notes, and faculty interview.

Field notes taken while observing the model-building exercise contained several statements from participants that supported self-awareness in terms of knowing one’s strengths and/or skills. The following excerpt was taken from the researcher’s field notes obtained during the model-building exercise. A study participant, Betty, was speaking of her assessment of personal skills that she had to offer to the model building exercise.

*I don’t have artistic ability when it comes to doing a big thing like this, but I can summarize what we do and put it together for our presentation. I know that I just can’t draw or paint or even glue stuff together. I have had to do this for Sunday School class and I usually last about 2 weeks before they switch me to something else that doesn’t involve artistic talent. I would rather do something that I know I can do than to mess this up for all of us* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).
The data indicated the participant was fully aware of her limitations as well as her strengths and preferred to perform a task that she for which she possessed the proper skill. These data also indicated that the participant possessed a degree of self-awareness by identifying her abilities.

The following three entries, taken from the field notes during the model building exercise, echoed this premise and provided further support for the subtheme of self-awareness as a component of valuing the student. Lisa said, “I know my limits and I know what I am good at. I can’t draw, but I can visualize this model” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Michelle stated:

*I am an exhibitor at craft fairs every fall. Give me a glue gun and I am ready to go. I may not be helpful with the overall design, but I can put it together and jazz it up* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

Another participant echoed the same premise, but added this clarification:

“I, the great Sheila, will draw the outline of this thing even though I cannot, NOT, being the important part, draw, but it is time to try something new” (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). The statements indicated the participants were aware of strengths and areas of improvement in terms of personal skills which by definition qualifies as self-awareness. Participants demonstrated knowledge of comfort or discomfort and self-awareness was employed by the act of affirming abilities or attempting to cultivate new skills.
Data were received from the course leader who observed participants during the model-building exercise where self-awareness was demonstrated by assessing skills of the group in order to complete the project.

As I circulated among the student groups, I heard students volunteering to bring forth whatever task that they felt sure of. Like small concept ideas with artistic ability or someone who has the ideas for the big picture, but let the creative learner put together the visual. I even watched someone, who said they couldn’t draw, sketch the whole model free hand and it was good, very good.

Most students know what they were good at and participated accordingly, but the one who thought she couldn’t draw and did such of good job found that she had some hidden talent. So I would say that they were very aware of strengths, weaknesses, and even more aware of their limits” (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The course leader continued by reporting that she observed two more identical instances of students clearly delineating what each had to offer in order to create a model of health promotion. The data indicated that self-awareness was important to engagement in that participants were aware of their abilities and engaged in the model-building activity more fully when performing a task or skill requiring prior expertise.

Notes from the researcher were reviewed for additional support for self-awareness.

After thinking about what I saw during the model-building exercise, I believe that students are very in tune to what they can and cannot do. Some students chose to
stay within their comfort levels. Some students decided to take risks and do something that they had never done or wanted to try. I heard students say that this was a chance to branch out and take chances. I saw that the students who indicated that they had a flair for the artistic were the ones who visited the craft table. They definitely knew their own abilities (Researcher, Researcher Notes, January, 2012).

Data from participants mirrored that from the course leader to provide support for self-awareness as a means of promoting student engagement.

In addition, a sense of self-awareness was demonstrated when participants made choices about the tiered assignment.

*Most students chose to do a blog rather than the family assessment, based on a self-assessment of personal skills. Most students had not been involved in blogging prior to NURN 416, but chose this activity to increase skills. They know their strengths* (Researcher, Researcher Journal, February, 2012).

These data were supported by comments from the focus group that clearly stated the participant was fully aware of her abilities and lack of ability.

*I knew that I didn’t have any technical ability, but I wanted to be able to do more.*

*I have no talent in this area, but I have a very helpful son. My skills are more verbal, or at least, this is what I’ve been told. I thought that the blog was a way to get more tech savvy and develop a new skill, believe me, I know I am missing the part of my brain that understands computers”* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).
Several other participants echoed the same thoughts. The following selection of remarks served to support that the adult student was self-aware in terms of ability, which contributed to valuing the student. “I chose the blog because it was an outlet for me and I knew that I had just enough computer stuff to be able to start it” (M’Lin, Focus Group, March 2012). Another participant responded with a similar perspective:

When I looked at the tiered assignment, I started to take some sort of inventory, for lack of a better phrase. I knew that I didn’t have a clue about blogging, but I needed to add something else to what I can do. So, why not blog? I can’t hurt anyone and I know what I’m good at so I gave it a try” (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant stated, “I will get so much more involved when I use what I am used to, but I will be even more involved if I am trying something new and want to get good at it” (Pam, Focus Group, March 2012).

The course leader reported that she observed students making a choice for or against doing a blog based on current skills and provided additional support for the subtheme of self-awareness.

I discussed the choice for the tiered assignment with each student and most knew what they could do, but the same students knew what they wanted to do. The blog seemed more interesting to the students. Nearly all students said that or something very similar. I think that everyone was very self-aware. They know what they excel at just by being adult learners. I think that those who chose the blog over the family assessment are not only self aware, but they know that the blog is the future. I think that they are very much aware of skills that they don’t
have and wanted to cultivate new ones. The two students who chose the family assessment seemed to be frightened about the technology and wanted to stay with skills that they knew they could do. I think that student engagement was increased because this group of students was not afraid to try something new. I think that being able to develop new skills and maintain old skills is helpful when you want the student to engage better (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

A sense of self-awareness was important for the participants when selecting assignments and designing personal learning experiences. Participants who were aware of their abilities appeared to engage in learning based on possessing a particular skill or needing to develop a new skill.

**Choice.**

Choice, as defined by the researcher, refers to selection of learning activities, topics, mode of delivery and use of skills based on personal preferences. For example, students were given many opportunities to choose the focus of several assignments, discussion topics, and selection of learning activities. The definition was specifically modified in order to obtain a more cohesive alignment with the focus of the research study. Findings indicated that choice was highly valued by the participants and that this subtheme was integral to student engagement. Data from tiered assignments, literature circles, student journals, questionnaire, faculty interview, focus group, and field notes supported choice as the fourth subtheme associated with valuing the student.

Choice was crucial to the entire study, not only as a means of differentiation, but as a means of promoting student engagement. Choice was evident in all three
differentiated instructional techniques: model-building exercise, tiered assignment, and literature circles. Student engagement was enhanced due to the positive impact of choice embedded into each differentiated instructional technique.

Responses received from the open-ended questionnaire indicated that choice was a key factor when selecting one of the two tiered assignment options. All six respondents reported that having a choice was important to the individual participant because “[it] allowed me to meet course requirements by choosing the type of assignment based on personal preference” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). One response from the questionnaire noted “[being] able to choose what I can do was great. I am much happier to do something that I am interested in. I put much more effort into the assignment and I still learn” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Another response supporting choice as a catalyst for engagement follows:

Choosing what I think is important really made me want to engage or whatever. I put much more in my blog because I was interested in it. It wasn’t just do the same thing that everyone else does and turn it in. I think that choice was so important for me because it goes back to personal interest. If I can choose from my agenda, I will be more active (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Data supported choice as a subtheme of valuing the students by affording them the opportunity to be engaged in learning.

A positive impact on student engagement was evident in the researcher’s notes. “Students posted more when choosing a topic of personal interest than when responding
to a classmate’s topic of personal interest” (Researcher, Researcher Notes, April, 2012).

Other sections of the researcher notes contained similar observations. It was noted that students revealed more of self and emotions when allowed to choose a specific focus for individual postings to the blog. “It was apparent that a student was passionate about a blog entry due to the amount of detail evident in an entry that was important to the blogger” (Researcher, Researcher Notes, April, 2012). Findings indicated that choice was an appropriate component to incorporate in differentiated instructional techniques.

Comments from the course leader supported choice as a vehicle for increasing student engagement and, thus, supporting the common theme of valuing the student.

I noticed that students were so excited to be given the opportunity to choose from the blog or family assessment. The blog topics were obviously important to each one so they really posted more often and on a deeper level than if the focus was chosen for them. I think that choice shows that we, as instructors, value the students’ experience and trust that they can make decisions for themselves (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

In addition, the course leader remarked that student engagement was definitely improved when the students could choose something of interest. The following comments related to requirements for literature circle discussions.

Even though you gave them some broad parameters and they had to choose something within those boundaries, it was still enough to let nearly everyone find something big, small, or whatever size of topic. It still fit with the category in the course objectives. Students like to talk about something they believe in. That was obvious in the way they did the tiered assignment. Choice definitely paved the
way for engagement. Choice also demonstrates that you trust them to make decisions about their learning and you value their opinion (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March 2012).

Remarks documented from the focus group interview also supported the findings that choice fosters student engagement by allowing students to have some control over the focus of the course.

*Literature circles gave me the chance to explore something of interest to me. I learned that some of the topics I chose to post were also good for other members of the group. I posted much more when it was something that was near to my heart, like SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Good way to start a dialogue* (Kathy, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant corroborated Kathy’s statement. “*It was great to discuss my interests instead of what someone else decides I am interested in. That is why I really felt involved in the lit circles*” (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012). Five other focus group participants echoed this thought as support for choice as a positive factor promoting student engagement (Researcher, Researcher Journal, March 2012).

One comment made during the focus group interview summarized the impact of choice on student engagement. The remark mirrors the previous remarks in this section and provided additional support for the subtheme of choice.

*I was so happy to choose an assignment instead of it being dictated to me. It made me feel that I was given credit for being able to make a contribution. As far as engagement, it would’ve been very different if I had to talk about something like croup in children or something else that I was not interested in at all and I*
would feel like it was so foreign and distant to me and I would be regurgitating the book or some other source (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Overall, the findings served to support choice as a component having a positive impact on student engagement.

**Skills and multiple intelligences.**

The fifth subtheme related to valuing the student was personal skills and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. Skills, according to Gardner (1983), are strengths and abilities possessed by the student that can be delineated in terms of multiple intelligences. Non-traditional/adult learners possess a myriad of personal skills gained from years of personal experience and life experience. Findings indicated that when personal skills along with Multiple Intelligences were taken into consideration, students responded positively in terms of engagement in NURN 416. Data that supported this statement were taken from researcher notes, field notes, faculty interview, and the focus group transcript.

Students demonstrated an understanding of Multiple Intelligences by correctly identifying personal skills and aligning the skills within the categories of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences during the study orientation session. Students asked many questions about placement of personal skills into Gardner’s categories. The students also identified intelligences that they did not possess or intelligences that they would like to develop (Researcher, Researcher Notes, January, 2012).

In addition, the field notes taken by the researcher revealed that students were observed employing skills and intelligences when participating in the model-building exercise. Researcher notes revealed:
Many times I heard students within each of the five small groups say that I am not artsy or I can draw. Subsequently, the same students mentioned to others within the group that a skill or intelligence was lacking or was possessed by the individual student. I heard at least five study participants from various small groups state their strengths or skills by using Gardner’s intelligences (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

A students’ knowledge of skills appeared to inspire engagement by allowing students to use skills/intelligences that were already developed.

Additional support for the subtheme of skills/Multiple Intelligences was evident from the perspective of the course leader.

_I could see that they really listened to you when you oriented them to the study._

When I circulated during the model building exercise, I kept hearing references to Gardner and they [students] were thinking about it when they built the model.

_Some students openly said they didn’t have a particular skill, but they mentioned the intelligence that was the closest to the skill_ (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Additional support for the importance of using personal skills and Multiple Intelligences to increase engagement was apparent when the course leader held individual discussions with students to determine the focus of tiered assignment.

_Most of the students said that they chose the blog because they wanted to increase their skills. They usually said something like, ‘I want to develop my technical skills.’ As a student became more adept at blogging, they made their blogs more_
detailed and included links and other things that they had not done in any other assignment. I think that when they could use an intelligence that they were already comfortable with, they participated more either in an email to me or whatever. If they used a skill that they were developing, their participation increased as the skill increased. I thought it was a good way to help them grow as learners along with growing skills of engagement (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March 2012).

The comments of the course leader provided support for the remarks of the participants and the researcher.

Remarks from the focus group also promoted skills/Multiple Intelligences as a means of increasing engagement. One participant responded:

*I think that it was nice to stretch my thinking by trying the blog which I didn’t have a clue about. I was able to take my skill of finding stuff...information...and feel good about that while I learned what it takes to create a blog. I felt like I was confronting a fear of technology and failure with that. I had, at least, one skill that I could count on so that I could feel that the project was still mine* (Cierra, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant continued Cierra’s thoughts by adding similar comments, saying:

*I don’t have the skills that some of the other students have because I am just plain old. But, I did the blog because I think it is important to keep learning new things. I don’t have all of those intelligences that Gardner talks about, but I can certainly find some that I am pleased with and some that I am not. I participated*
more because this assignment made me believe that I could do it. If I get to use what I know then I will be more active in posting and responding” (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Findings indicated that employing the skills/intelligences that a student considered to be well honed had a positive impact on student engagement. A related finding indicated that student engagement may improve as one becomes more confident in a developing skill.

**Theme Two: Framing**

The second theme to emerge from the data was framing. Framing was defined by Mezirow (1991) as personal interpretation of the meaning of an experience or event as it relates to one’s life. Framing assists one to link current experience with past experience so that the individual can conceptualize the experience and determine place and value of the experience (Mezirow, 1991). Theorists, such as Mezirow, postulate that adult learners require a sense of meaning with which to associate the knowledge acquired.

Framing helped non-traditional, adult learners to appreciate knowledge. It further served to establish a means of classifying data so that it is readily available to the learner and to determine the importance of the data within the context of the human experience. Framing is a necessary component of non-traditional, adult learning (Brookfield, 1990).

Subthemes derived from analysis included making meaning and context. Making meaning, as defined by the primary researcher, is the personal value that the student places on an experience or event in the individual’s life. According to Brookfield (1991), the adult learner requires meaning in order to comprehend the relationship between
experiences and/or events. Making meaning of that which is learned is an integral part of true appreciation of new knowledge.

The subtheme of context also emerged as a factor affecting student engagement. Context, as defined by the researcher, is similar to making meaning. Context is the frame of reference that makes learning important to students. It also solidifies an understanding of how a particular experience, event, or concept fits into a student’s lifetime of experiences. The subtheme of context gives a framework for understanding how knowledge fits into the student’s life.

**Making meaning.**

Adult learners must have a foundation for processing information that encompasses how learning will be used (Kasworm, 2003). Making meaning, as defined by the researcher, is the value that a student places on an experience or event. An adult who is able to value learning must also be able to find a place of importance for that piece of knowledge that clarifies its worth and thus, increases the value of knowledge. Study participants who were able to find meaning in their learning also reported that participation in class was greatly enhanced once meaning had been established. Data to support making meaning as a factor that influenced student engagement was taken from field notes, focus group, and student journals.

Researcher field notes revealed that adult learners must fully understand the meaning of learning so that engagement in learning will be enhanced. Field notes taken by the researcher during the model-building activity contained four comments from students that supported this premise.
I observed a small group of students who were discussing how their model of health promotion fit with the bigger picture of health. Students responded with comments such as ‘it fits with my definition of health’ or ‘I think the model reflects how I see health promotion in my own life or based on past experience, I thinks it fits here.’ (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012). Participants were exploring how their views of health promotion fit with the overall theme of health and vice versa. This occurred as a means of learning and as a meaning of using personal meaning to engage in a discussion of the concept.

Additional support for making meaning was evident in the following comments from the course leader in which framing and meaning were brought together so as to form a platform on which students would engage using personal meaning.

I could see the wheels turning when I introduced one of the learning theories. It was the health belief model that I had to find a way to help them understand it. I gave an example of how I related the model to my own experience and then I saw heads nodding in agreement. Then came the response from the students that identified what the model meant to them. They needed a framework to hang a piece of information on and after they do that in their own minds, the participation will come. They need to see where it fits into their own lives”

Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The remarks from the course leader indicated that engagement was positively affected when meaning was found by the student. This premise mirrored the data supplied by the researcher.
The following comments were taken from the focus group transcript and related to both the tiered assignment and literature circles. Data revealed that students make meaning of knowledge in order to fully understand its value. Once understanding had been achieved and value had been accepted, the student participated in discussions and offered personal insight related to the topic at hand.

*I have to see how I am going to use information before I can start discussing it with people. We have so much to learn and I just need to know if this bit of learning is relevant to what I do. If I can’t find a place for it somewhere, then what good is it to me. So I walk around thinking what it means* (Kathy, Focus Group, March 2012).

Another student continued the focus of Kathy’s remarks by commenting:

*I agree with Kathy. I have a lot of experience in OB nursing, but it is hard to study other specialties and figure out how that will benefit me in OB. I have to find that link or something that relates to my work. I also walk around thinking what does it mean. What I need to understand is that I may not have the meaning yet. So for engagement purposes in a nursing class, what I study needs to have meaning to me or my participation is lukewarm* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Additional remarks from focus group members provided support for the previous remarks and highlighted making meaning as integral to learning.

*You know, I need to get out of my comfort zone. I have this little place where I have all the information and things that I need to be a good nurse and a good person. If I cannot see where something like health promotion theories will*
benefit me, then I just let it go in one ear and out of the other. When I try to apply it to critical care, then I can use it” (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

This statement from the participant indicated that finding meaning in a concept was the key to framing how and where the information was classified and valued by the student. The same participant also provided another remark that supported meaning as a catalyst for student engagement:

I will have absolutely nothing to say about something we discuss in class if I don’t see how it relates to me. Since we are supposed to focus on engagement, I would say that whatever it is must mean something to me before I participate in class (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

The same participant went on to clarify her comments by stating, “I mean that it takes some soul, no, it takes brain searching for me to find something in my mind that I can work with to make an unrelated topic mean something to me” (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012). Again, the subtheme of making meaning was evident in the data as having a positive impact on student engagement in learning.

Remarks noted in student journals supported the premise that meaning was a key component necessary for engagement. One participant provided support by stating:

My participation in literature circles depended on whether or not I could relate to what was posted. I don’t have a lot to say about pediatric health promotion, but when it comes to the elderly, it has a whole lot to say. I take care of my parents because of all the fun stuff that happens to you when you get older so that is
something that I can relate to so I will post more comments (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

This thought was supported by another comment from the journal of another student.

What makes me get involved in all the assignments is knowing that I have experience to back up what I am posting, or writing, or saying. I think that when I use that, I am more confident when we do things like the blog and the lit circles (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

Both entries, along with the other forms of data, served to support the subtheme of making meaning as a necessary component for increasing student engagement.

**Context.**

Context is the frame of reference that one places on an event, experience, or concept in order to enhance meaning (Mezirow, 1991). For example, a student who was able to apply new principles of sterile technique even when using supplies that were not familiar to the student was applying context to the situation. By drawing on prior experiences, the student was able to complete the procedure without difficulty. Context provides a background that fosters relationships of past knowledge to current situations. Data that supported this subtheme was drawn from student journals, faculty interview, and the focus group.

Student journals provided data that indicated context was necessary to clarify understanding and to enrich its meaning.

We [nurses] have to know so, so, so much. We have to be able to take care of any kind of patient. I need to have something to relate to so that I can do the work.
What I mean is that if I had not known that vital signs for a fresh open heart post-op patient were a bit different than what I see in oncology, then I would not take care of the patient the right way or I would overreact. I need to see what is normal for certain circumstances, is not normal for all patients. It is the same in this class, unless I understand the limits, my talk in class or online will not be very good (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

A similar entry in a journal indicated that student engagement was dependent on context of the discussion. The same entry supported the thoughts of the participant as stated in the previous entry.

Even in class, I find it hard to participate when I can’t relate to the topic. I know the general idea, but I need a situation to give it a face, so to speak. I need practical application to what I do so that I know it will be something that I can use now or in the future. My engagement or involvement in the literature circles and even my blog was not good when I hit a point that I knew needed to be included, but didn’t really affect me. I tried to find an example of how to apply certain things, but it did not mean much to me until I put my background in and then I could put the whole picture together (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

The course leader provided support for the subtheme of context, by citing how context affected how students participated in tiered assignments and literature circles.

Context is so important to the adult learner. I watched the students as they were planning the tiered assignment. Each one told me why they wanted to do a blog
on a particular topic. Every student had a personal reason or experience that
framed why the choice was made. Context gives meaning to a thought or idea
that the student does not understand. It is how they relate to an unknown concept
(Course Leader, Faculty Transcript, March, 2012).

Additional comments from the course leader supported the findings of the participants
and highlighted context as integral to student engagement.

Students are bombarded with so much information. They are very quick to
discard something if they are unable to find a place for it in the big picture, it just
sits there. I can tell this when they post to the literature circles. If they have some
sort of reference point, the entries were more detailed and they consisted of a lot
on personal experience that helps others understand and participate even more
(Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March 2012).

Focus group remarks provided support for context as a means of increasing
student engagement and echo the thought expressed by the course leader.

I loved the lit circles because I could, or I had to bring my background as a nurse
and as a regular person into the discussion. Otherwise, I would not relate what
others had posted and kept to just the bare minimum to get points (M’Lin, Focus
Group, March, 2012).

In addition, another participant provided support for the subtheme of context with these
remarks.

It was interesting to see how others perceived what was posted and how they
make connections between what they know now and what they knew then. It was
like putting all the pieces together to make a mural (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

**Theme Three: Learning Environment**

The third theme derived from the data was the importance of the learning environment. Learning environment, as defined by the researcher, is the setting in which a student learns such as a traditional classroom, online classroom, home, library or other locations as determined by the student. Subthemes evident in the findings were safety or safe learning environment, freedom, structure, and forced engagement. Findings were taken from field notes, tiered assignments, literature circles, faculty interview, focus group, and student journals.

**Safe learning environment.**

Findings indicated that a safe learning environment was essential for increasing student engagement when using differentiated instructional techniques. The non-traditional, adult learner requires a degree of comfort when expressing personal opinions as well as bringing experiences into a learning situation. Students who know that personal perspective and personal experiences will be respected and encouraged will feel at ease when contributing to an online or in-class discussion. The adult learner will be more likely to increase participation when sensing that it is a safe environment for disclosure.

Safe learning environment, as defined by the researcher, is an environment where students know contributions to learning are acknowledged and accepted without fear of penalty or punishment. For example, a student feels comfortable expressing personal
opinions when discussing both sides of the abortion issue. Findings of the study indicated that students who believe the learning environment to be safe were more engaged in the course as evidenced by quality and quantity of comments in and outside of the classroom and detail contained in assignments. Supporting data were taken from student journals, faculty interview, tiered assignments, and focus group comments.

Student journals revealed that participants reacted positively when realizing that the learning environment was a secure place in which they could freely exchange ideas and opinions without fear of penalty.

Once I felt that I could say just about anything and not be attacked for having an opinion that is like no other. I seem to be ‘on the fringes’ when compared to my group, but they accepted me and seemed to like that I had a very different take on whatever we happened to discuss. I didn’t think that at the beginning, but I got used to them and they got used to me and then I started posting more (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

Another entry from another student journal echoed the thought expressed in the previous journal entry and highlighted that a safe learning environment was necessary for student engagement.

Just once I wanted to tackle taboo topics like abortions, Obama care, and other issues that divide us. Some classes that I have taken did not do that because it was such a controversial topic and a conservative view did not mean anything to my classmates. I felt like I had to defend my words every step of the way. Here in this class, I never had any of that from anyone. I was very active in class and
online because it was a very safe environment” (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

The course leader expressed thoughts that provided additional support for safe learning environment while reiterating much of the data provided by the student journals.

The ground rules were helpful to get the circles started and students were leery of divulging ideas, but as I read through each week of the circles and I saw more and more of some very personal experiences being shared with the group. I think that this particular DI technique was wonderful at making every student feel that they are important. They can say things that they would not have said if they perceived that a debate would ensue and have to defend their view (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The course leader also remarked about protection: “Several students chose blog topics because they felt protected by the course rules. I believe that safety must be an inherent part of implementing differentiated instructional techniques” (Course leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012). The perspective of the course leader provided additional support for safety of the learning environment as one of the subthemes necessary to promote student engagement.

Remarks from the focus group provided additional support for a safe learning environment.

Engagement improved when I felt comfortable to express myself. The DI technique of lit circles was great! I knew that we could speak freely without having everything deteriorate into a big shouting match. I did not agree with
some of the posts in my group, but I knew that I could trust the group to be
accepting of my opinion or at least tolerate it (Sheila, Focus Group, March 2012).

Additional comments from the focus group gave credence to the importance of
safety in the learning environment.

Before I bring up a topic that might get a negative reaction, I want to know that I
have equal standing with all students and faculty. I mean that I can speak without
fear of hitting a nerve with someone who is against me. It helps to have ground
rules that even out everyone’s thoughts. I can work with that. Agree to disagree
is important. I have had classes where that was a rule, but when you take a
break, the debate is on. I will be much more vocal if I know that I am not going to
be attacked (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

One student cited that the online literature circles provided enough anonymity to
feel comfortable sharing thoughts that she might not have shared in a traditional
classroom setting.

My response and my postings were much more detailed because I felt safe. I also
think that online lit circles helped me be more bold. I was fine when responding
to my group, but I don’t think that I would have been so open if we were face-to-
face (Kathy, Focus Group, March 2012).

An entry in the researcher’s journal provided support for Kathy’s statement along with
the other data pertaining to the safe learning environment.

After observing the blogs and literature circles as well as the in class discussions,
I am fully convinced that students will engage in learning activities more fully if
they feel that they are protected. Online postings were very open, detailed, and controversial once the ground rules were posted. Even though students were already participating at a higher than expected level prior to posting the rules, there was an increase of 2-3 additional posts per literature circle and two blog posts (tiered assignment) after the rules were posted. I think that I could see people relax in class when we decided to discuss Obamacare and then I reviewed the rules. I saw students relax their shoulders and begin to make comments once I reminded them that they were in a safe place (Researcher, Researcher Journal, February, 2012).

The findings from the data supported safe learning environment as having a positive impact on student engagement.

**Freedom.**

Freedom was one of the subthemes evident in the findings of the study. Freedom is limited restriction of student input, verbal, non-verbal, or written contributions. The definition was developed by the researcher. For example, a student must meet course requirements within selected guidelines, but the student has the freedom to determine the focus of a particular project. Repeatedly, study participants reported that having a degree of freedom to include various components that assist in framing knowledge was integral to increasing engagement when using differentiated instructional techniques. Data that supported freedom as a subtheme of learning environment were taken from the open-ended questionnaire, faculty interview, and the focus group.
Response to the questionnaire cited freedom as critical to increasing student engagement. Six of the seven responses stated that freedom to accomplish the course work in ways that were quite different from one another made them want to be more involved (Study Participants, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). Other comments taken from the questionnaire indicated that freedom was prominent in each of the three differentiated instructional techniques utilized in NURN 416. “I was so happy to see that we [students] could make some decisions on our own. I like having freedom, and mostly, to be trusted to not take advantage of it” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Another comment emphasized freedom as a component that should be mandatory when teaching adult learners. “I’m not the same person who went to nursing school a long time ago. I was an amateur student then. Now I am a professional student. I NEED freedom” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). Another response provided support for the findings previously listed in this section. “The differentiated instruction had freedom built in. That was so new and long overdue” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March 2012).

A similar response echoed the premise of the previous data. “It is about time that adult students are acknowledged as adults by allowing some freedom with course work. The blogs and lit circles were so open and free, I felt like a weight had been lifted” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). One comment from the questionnaire in regard to the tiered assignment was succinct and to the point. “Free at last, free at last” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). The final
remark from the questionnaire summarized the importance of freedom while giving support to related findings delineated in this section.

_It was so incredibly wonderful to be treated like an adult and given freedom to make decisions about what I think would be beneficial to learn. I am not the expert, and I agree that there should be some standard content in a nursing course, but everyone does not have to do the exact same thing. Freedom to create a meaningful assignment was so refreshing. Bravo differentiated instruction_ (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

This remark, along with other comments detailed in the findings, indicated that the subtheme of freedom was an integral component of a learning environment that encouraged student engagement.

The course leader echoed the thoughts of the study participants:

_I could see excitement in most of the students when they realized that the blog and the circles were largely left up to them. A couple of students told me that they ‘felt FREE to learn’ and that they had never been in a class like this before. I was so glad to hear this because I think that was the goal of the study. If non-traditional/adult learners are given freedom to complete assignments with just enough guidelines to keep order, they are going to participant more. Even if you don’t always see it in class, I see it in the work that they turn it_ (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Focus group comments echoed the findings derived from the questionnaire and the faculty interview. It was evident that focus group members felt that freedom was one
of many factors that improved student engagement and contributed to the learning environment.

*I didn’t feel controlled or limited with any of the DI techniques. I was allowed to think for myself instead of rewording something from the book that some expert would like for me to say. It was kind of like a quilt. The framework for each assignment was there, but I had the freedom to fill in the blanks with material of my choice, especially with the lit circles. That is what I do when I make a quilt and it comes out beautifully. I felt that I had freedom to enjoy learning since I could fill in the blanks with topics I was interested in* (Pam, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another comment from a focus group member highlighted freedom as instrumental in student engagement and mirrored previous data related to freedom.

*I had just enough freedom to pull me into an assignment. What I mean is that I was free to explore a new topic or stick with something that I could do easily. I chose to branch out and selected a topic that would be a stretch for me [related tiered assignment]. If the topic had been assigned to me then I might not have put so much into it* (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Regardless of the type of differentiated instructional technique, non-traditional, adult learners indicated that engagement was enhanced from having freedom to make decisions about the learning environment.
Structure.

The subtheme of structure was evident in data from the student journals, open-ended questionnaire, and the focus group. Structure, as defined by the researcher, refers to the design of an assignment, activity, environment, and the framework of the course that embodies key elements necessary to meet learning objectives. The course, NURN 416, was structured with three differentiated instructional techniques in mind along with mechanisms that allowed for student participation. Needs of the non-traditional, adult learner were also taken into consideration. Numerous opportunities to become engaged in learning were present for the participants to share life experiences and exchange ideas.

Findings from the student journals indicated that the structure of the entire course and the related assignments had a positive impact on student engagement. Remarks from one of the student journals identified the structure of several assignments as instrumental in increasing participation for the non-traditional adult learner.

*When we built the health promotion model, everyone had to do something because we weren’t building the same old thing and had to use the book to help us come up with a model that looked like everyone else. Just by giving very general directions and making clear that there is no right or wrong made me want to do something different instead of sit back and wait for someone to tell me what to do. The way it was designed made me want to participate* (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).
Additional remarks from another journal echoed the thoughts of the first participant and provided support for structure as a subtheme of learning. The remarks related to the model-building exercise.

*It was great to WANT to participate because there wasn’t any wrong way to do it.*

*The way the whole thing was designed drew me in because I couldn’t fail so why not give it a try? If there were rules and rules, I would probably hang back and just go with the flow for fear of making a mistake or doing something to hurt the group grade. Finally, I can learn in my own way and without restraint* (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

Another journal entry supporting structure of the differentiated instruction technique (model-building) provided support for use as a vehicle for increasing student engagement.

*The model was like nothing else I had seen before, so I participated more than I usually do because there was no penalty. I didn’t have to focus on losing points.*

*Or, more importantly, making a fool of myself. So I worked on it more than I would have if we all [the entire class] were assigned to come up with a model that fit what some expert has done. The way the assignments, on and off line and in class, were made was the reason that I was so interested in this class and wanted to be engaged* (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

One remark highlighted that the structure was just as important as the actual activity.
There was a lot of thought that went into model-building. The way the exercise was set up really attracted me. I am so tired of doing the same thing to get the same answer as hundreds of nurses that have gone before me. I am not the teenager or twenty-year-old that I was the first time I was in school. This was the first group activity since I have come back to school that I felt it was designed for me at age 40. Nice to have a chance to cut loose and really learn something

(Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

Comments, such as this one, served to support the premise that structuring learning is integral to providing a learning environment that focuses on student engagement.

The response to the open-ended questionnaire was similar to the entries in the student journal in that participants stated structure was integral to engagement. Participants provided data supporting findings previously stated in this section as well as emphasizing structure of the differentiated instructional techniques positively influenced student engagement. One respondent noted:

There was such a low pressure and we were free to make mistakes even though there was no right or wrong. I appreciated having a group that responded well to minimal structure and I think we did a better job by not having all these rules. The lit circles were wonderful because we didn’t have to discuss what somebody thought we should discuss. The tiered assignment was structured a little bit, enough to have some guidelines, but the rest was up to me. Great class (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).
Additional remarks from the questionnaire supported the findings listed above and highlighted structure as a means of capitalizing on factors that appealed to the non-traditional, adult learner.

_"I learned something about myself when we did the model. I like being free from scrounging for points. I didn’t worry about that at all and it was because the instructor made my or our input as important as any of the experts. I also like the fact that the assignment HAD to have MY input. I had to bring something of my past so that I had a part in building the model. This was the kind of activity that I can learn from since I have grown as a student in the past decade"_ (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

The focus group provided support for structure of differentiated instructional techniques as a catalyst for student engagement.

_"It [model-building] was so different! I have never felt so into a small group activity as I did that first night of class. Here we are, tired from a day’s work, and each one of us was working on the model with so much energy, you would have thought we had a couple of espressos before class. The structure of the assignment made me be more engaged because there was no right or wrong. I was able to be creative and I wanted to do well because I was representing me"_ (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Other findings from the focus group supported the subtheme of structure and also indicated that engagement improved because the model-building activity was interesting.
I have never done this before and I was surprised that it was so interesting. I expected to open the book and pick something out of there. Instead, I really wanted to participate because it involved my thoughts. That makes it an interesting activity (M’Lin, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Structure of the learning environment as well as the assignments continued to be important as evidenced by the data from focus group remarks that provided support for the subtheme.

I think that the way you [researcher] designed the lit circles was very good. You [researcher] included choice, which is always a winner. But you included just enough structure. You included just enough rules to keep us from getting into chaos. And you treated us like the adults we are by letting us guide our own discussions. Lit circles would have been something that I HAD to do instead of something that I wanted to do. I know that I posted more than I had to and so did many of the others (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another comment from a member of the focus group supported previous findings that structure was one of the factors that increased engagement and learning as well.

Lit circles were more like a conversation so it was easy to respond. Not like the usual discussion board. If it was the usual make one posting and respond to three, I would not have been so involved (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Findings from all sources of data supported structure as an integral component that had a positive impact on student engagement.
**Forced engagement.**

Forced engagement was the last subtheme related to learning environment that emerged from the data. Forced engagement, as defined by the researcher, refers to participation or involvement in the learning environment that must be performed in order to meet requirements of an assignment. The subtheme was included in the study due to journal entries and remarks from the focus group that provided data and clarification to support this subtheme.

Student journals provided direct support for the concept of forced engagement. Two journal entries for the questions pertaining to the model-building exercise, tiered assignment, and literature circles began with the words, “I was forced to participate because . . .” (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012). Both students cited that engagement was forced when grades were awarded for participation. Furthermore, the participants cited: “Literature circles were a positive experience, but we had to participate because points were attached. I was still engaged” (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012). No entries in any of the student journals cited that forced engagement had a negative effect on the students’ involvement in the course. One entry identified: “Forced engagement may not be the same as regular engagement, and so is it truly engagement or following the rules? I’m not sure” (Study Participant, Student Journal, March 2012).

Indirectly, the concept of forced engagement was alluded to during the focus group interview. Several participants stated that they *had* to participate or grades would
suffer (Cierra, Focus Group, March, 2012). This comment was made in reference to the literature circle posting requirement. Another student commented:

> Being forced to participate isn’t a bad thing so I did not see it that way. I think that anything an instructor can do to make participation part of learning is good. I enjoy hearing what others think. It made the class better (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

In response, one student said:

> There is nothing new about points for participating. It is an expectation. We have a lot to offer as I see it. Why not let the class know. Even though the literature circles had points attached, I did not feel that I was being forced to do this (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Regardless of whether student engagement was forced or optional, findings from the focus group indicated that students were engaged in each of the differentiated instructional techniques and that requiring students to participate was the basis for encouraging student engagement.

**Theme Four: Non-traditional Teaching Techniques**

One of the most interesting themes of the study was the emphasis on non-traditional teaching techniques. Non-traditional teaching techniques, as defined by the researcher, are methods or strategies not commonly used within the traditional or online classroom. Much of the supporting data contained references and comparisons of the differences between past educational experiences from nursing school for the Associate of Science (ASN) degree and the current experience in an RN-BSN completion program.
Data pertaining to non-traditional teaching techniques were taken from the open-ended questionnaire, student journal, tiered assignment (blog), researcher notes, faculty interview, and focus group transcript.

“Out-of-the-box” thinking.

“Out-of-the-Box” thinking, as a catch phrase, was continually prominent in the data. Regardless of the data source, study participants or course faculty, “out-of-the-box” thinking was identified as a central theme contributing to the positive outcome of using differentiated instructional techniques. One response to the open-ended questionnaire emphasized how important it was to do something very different from traditional teaching methods.

This class was completely different from any nursing class I have ever had. Keep doing this! I learned so much more because I got to think about things in a new way (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Other remarks from the questionnaire echoed this thought and provided support for this subtheme.

The new types of assignments were a very good way to get the discussion going. I spoke up in class much more than I usually do and it was because it was out-of-the-box thinking applied to nursing education. This was so futuristic (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

This response served to support differentiated instructional techniques as a means of increasing student engagement because it is not a staple method of teaching in nursing education. Another comment taken from the questionnaire reinforced this premise.
The model exercise, my blog, and lit circles were like nothing I have ever done before. I learned more from this class because those assignments made me think and made me want to hear what other students think. I even read more in the book than I had to. Reading more than is assigned. That is engagement. KEEP doing this! It opened up so much more to me (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March 2012).

Notes, taken by the researcher when reviewing the tiered assignment (blog), highlighted “out-of-the-box” thinking as a staple component of increasing student engagement. It was noted that four participants posted final entries within the blogs stating that non-traditional teaching techniques were a welcome change from standard techniques.

This is my last day to blog. It was refreshing to be able to communicate with each of you by doing something new. If there are any nursing instructors out there who happen to see this blog, I hope that you teach your students by doing something that is “out-of-the-box” thinking because I learned so much more doing this instead of another paper” (Pam, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

In closing my blog, I would like to encourage anyone to get out of your comfort zone and try something new like this. I feel like I am much more involved in the class whether it is posting to the blog or just being more aware of my own learning” (Margie, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

Another participant echoed the same thoughts:
I would like to thank everyone for participating in my blog. This was such a new way of learning for me and it was difficult for me to be outside of the lines. I was able to answer your questions and even post more information than you asked for. Thanks for making my assignment a good one (M’Lin, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

Another participant expressed a similar view.

It is time to close the blog, but I will remember to think “out-of-the-box” even in a traditional class. Remember to dare to do something challenging and expand that comfort zone and you will find that it’s not so bad outside of the usual. Thanks for following through this journey (Kathy, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

All remarks served to support the subtheme of “out-of-the-box” thinking as a catalyst for student engagement. Statements from each of the participants indicated that the “out-of-the-box” nature of the differentiated instructional techniques and the non-traditional approach was beneficial to increasing student engagement within the course.

Notes taken by the researcher corroborated comments from student journals, questionnaire, and tiered assignments. Comments documented during the model-building exercise were positive and supported previously documented findings in this section. All groups made at least one remark about how exciting it is to do something unique (Researcher, Field notes, January, 2012). One student said, “I like this because it is so different. All of my other classes are so strict on what I learn and how I learn. I was ready for a change to something new” (Researcher, Researcher Notes, January, 2012).
Also evident in the researcher notes was clarification regarding the original statement using black or white to describe prior teaching techniques. The researcher cited that there were nine instances in which this phrase was used in conjunction with “out-of-box” thinking.

Students are comparing traditional teaching with the differentiated instructional techniques. I hear students saying what a relief it is to do something different. I also hear the phrase “out-of-the-box” thinking and no black and white thinking. I see each student participating in the model-building and I can see that the participation level for both the tiered assignment and literature circles is greater than the minimum requirements. It appears that students were ready for a change or at least something that is not so heavily regulated and everyone ends up with the same result (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

The course leader provided additional support for the subtheme of ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking as well as support for the researcher’s prior comments.

I have been teaching for many, many years. I understand the needs of the adult student. In this class, I could see how students really were receptive to the DI methods. Even though most were hesitant at first, eventually, they came around and were becoming more at ease with being asked to do something without extremely specific guidelines. I could tell that they were used to traditional nursing school methods that award points for this and points for that. There is a very strict grading rubric. It took time for each student to become comfortable and relax. And when they relaxed, they opened up. They became more verbal in
class and did not seem to be timid to bring in a new topic, for example. I also believe that I saw changes in behavior from a casual approach to a very focused approach. When I observed that, then the engagement followed. Emails from students, remarks in the literature circles, class participation improved. It seemed to me that the students wanted to get out of that box, but needed permission to do so (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The most crucial support for “out-of-the-box” thinking was found in the focus group data. The focus group participants repeatedly referred to “out-of-the-box” thinking and “black or white” thinking as a comparison. One focus group member remarked:

I was so glad when we went over the course requirements. The way that the work was presented was confusing at first because I am used to having, for example, a paper, presentation, and discussion board for every nursing class. Even though we still had to do the regular work, there was this whole new world out there. Everything in my work is pretty black or white. We are trained that way and we were educated that way. Here, we have a class that wants us to figure it out for ourselves. That is so non-traditional and I am ready to be non-traditional. I have more experience than I did the first time I went to school. So why shouldn’t I respond to a technique that is not so concrete? I was ready to dive right into the model-building and I was excited to do the blog because there wasn’t such a restriction of every little thing. I think that the DI techniques were so unfamiliar to me, but they were so important to help me grow. I had to think outside of that proverbial box and I loved it (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).
Another participant supported Margie’s remarks and continued this thought by comparing course requirements in NURN 416 to prior RN-BSN courses.

*Finally, black and white is gone! I feel like I could be me and still learn at the same time. I put much more into the entire course because I could branch out and it was still acceptable. Even the grading rubric for the tiered assignment had some different criteria. Creativity was one. We are encouraged to be creative in nursing and the same for my ASN schooling, but the restrictions or policies are within such narrow boundaries. I did not get a chance to really grow* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

This remark strongly supported the use of non-traditional teaching techniques as a means of improving engagement and growth of the adult learner. In addition, all previous data in this section and related to “out-of-the-box” thinking was supported as a subtheme of non-traditional teaching techniques.

**Control over learning.**

The second subtheme related to non-traditional teaching techniques was control over learning. Non-traditional, adult learners need to have some degree of control over their education (Knowles, 1978). Control over learning, as defined by the researcher, is the ability to make decisions about one’s efforts related to learning and to make contributions and changes as appropriate. Supporting data were found in the questionnaire, faculty interview, and the focus groups.

Response to the open-ended questionnaire indicated that the participant viewed differentiated instructional techniques as a means of promoting control over learning.
The DI methods gave me control over my work. Just by the way that they were designed. There were so many chances to pick a health promotion issue with whatever I did. Lit circles! What a great way to let us control what we want to discuss! No list of questions that the group did not design. I had control over the topics that I wanted to discuss. Of course there were limits, but not so much that I had to post a response to what someone else decided I should be interested in (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Additional comments that support control over learning as a subtheme of non-traditional teaching techniques were evident in another open-ended questionnaire response.

This class was exactly what I needed. I have been setting in other classes and wanted to make a comment about how I relate something that happened to me at work to some of the course objectives, but the whole course was already planned without my input. Because you [researcher] used DI with us, I felt like I was creating the work for the course that was special to my learning goals (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

The faculty interview with the course leader also supported control over learning as a key factor to non-traditional, student engagement. The course leader supported the remarks from the open-ended questionnaire with her perspective regarding control over learning.

These individuals are all adult learners who work as nurses. Much of what they do is highly regulated. They were just waiting for a chance to take charge. I find that to be true because of the way adults react to course work that is generic. The
traditional 18-23 year-old student still requires much more direction as to what to focus on when studying. The adult learner seems not to respond to being told what to focus on. We do such a disservice when we (instructors) develop an assignment that is generic for the traditional student. Adults may do very well with the same assignment, but it is not the best use of the adult life. These students were very shocked on that first night of class. Their inquisitive faces said, ‘no set rules, no predetermined focus, I don’t know what to do. They were used to traditional education with very definitive grading rubrics and very detailed paths of how to complete work (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Control over learning was noted here in the interview, not only as an asset to adult learning, but also as a factor to promote student engagement.

I observed a big change from the first class to third night of class. Some confusion at first, but then they seemed to adjust to the non-traditional format. When the students realized that each one had to determine their own learning goals, it was as if a light bulb went on. Definitely not accustomed to being an active participant in their own education (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

This remark, along with previous comments from the course leader, indicated that integrating student controlled course activities may eventually bring about a positive impact on student engagement.
The response from the focus group echoed the remarks from the course leader and provided support for the subtheme of control over learning as a means of generating a positive impact on student engagement.

*It was one evening at the beginning of class that it finally dawned on me. I am in charge of my work for this course. The amount of control that I had finally hit me. I am choosing fitness for the blog. I am choosing to talk about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). No one made me do this. I wanted to do this. I was in charge. How nice it was to have my own agenda instead of doing what someone else thinks I should do* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Additional remarks echoed similar thoughts, as in the following two responses.

*I agree with (student name). It was scary at first because I didn’t have any clue as to what my project would look like or the reams and reams of instructions that had penalties for not following the status quo. This is not what I know from ASN nursing school. This time I have some authority to take the assignments to what I think would be interesting to me. I wanted to scream out loud to anyone who would listen! This is what school should be. If this could be the type of class that I had before [ASN degree], I would have been much more active in class* (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

The following response echoed Michelle’s response.

*I liked having some control. Being told exactly what to do worked the first time I was in school, but now, give me some credit. I can control my learning with guidance of course. I don’t think that I have to have someone else plan*
everything out for me. I can do this myself. Also, having some authority over what I am learning makes me participate. I think that student engagement and control are interrelated because one promotes the other (Cierra, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Remarks made by focus group members indicated that control over learning was an integral component of non-traditional teaching techniques necessary to foster student engagement.

**Self-directed learning.**

Self-directed learning has long been a staple of adult learning. This philosophy of education capitalizes on the nature of the non-traditional, adult learner (Knowles, 1978). Self-directed learning refers to knowledge that is gained as a result of student determined effort, pace, complexity, and means of acquisition. The learner develops a course of education that considers needs and preferences of self. Findings that support self-directed learning as a subtheme of non-traditional learning were compiled from the faculty interview and the focus group.

Comments from the course leader indicated that student engagement benefited from using differentiated instructional techniques that incorporated self-direction.

*I have quite a bit of experience with adult learners and self-direction is present. In fact, my experience tells me that self-directed learning is essential for adult education. They are ready to be on their own to some degree. The level of participation flows from that. Independence is important and self-direction is part of independence* (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).
When asked to provide an example that supported the data listed above and the subtheme, the course leader responded:

> Here is the example that comes to mind when I talk about self-direction. After the students realized that course work was not going to be the same all around the class. It is similar to culture shock or reality shock. The traditional classroom is quite regimented and more directed usually because of the type of student population and requirements of our governing bodies. Not to disrespect those things because they are necessary, but self-directed learning is not as prominent a need as it is with adult learners (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The remarks from the course leader supported the subtheme of self-directed learning as a catalyst for student engagement due to the nature of participation or engagement inherent to the subtheme.

**Theme Five: Behaviors of Engagement**

The fifth and final theme derived from the data was behaviors of engagement. Actions, remarks, and expressions exhibited by the study participants substantiated the theme as important indicators of non-traditional, adult student engagement. Behaviors of engagement, as defined by the researcher, included verbal and non-verbal actions that require one to interact with any being and/or component of a course of study. Behaviors of engagement may include, but are not limited to, active listening, responding to and initiating class discussions, active interest in and cognitive, psychomotor, and affective performance in learning activities (Belliveau-Brown, 2008). Generally, behaviors of engagement are the outward expression of efforts to be involved in learning. Subthemes derived from data included enjoyment, accountability, ownership, motivation, and
creativity. Field notes, researcher notes, student journals, open-ended questionnaire, faculty interview, and focus group transcript were the data sources that provided support for behaviors of engagement.

**Enjoyment.**

Learning should be fun. Faculty and student participants in NURN 416 demonstrated that differentiated instructional techniques had a positive impact on engagement. It was also evident that model-building, tiered assignment and literature circles promoted an atmosphere of enjoyment. Support for the subtheme of enjoyment was found in field notes, researcher notes, student journals, faculty interview, and focus group transcript. Enjoyment, as defined by the researcher, refers to actions, expressions, and comments that indicate the student is having a positive experience.

Field notes taken during the model-building exercise revealed that participants were enjoying learning.

*I see smiles and bright eyes in nearly all members of each group. Group #4 is laughing and their conversation is animated. There are heads nodding in agreement. Students huddle together as they concentrate on making the model. When selecting supplies, several participants stated that this was the first fun activity they had experienced in nursing school. All participants are focused intently on creating a health promotion model* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

Reflective notes maintained by the researcher documented that students appeared to be happy and enjoyed the model-building activity. “*Smiles, laughter, and thought-provoking discussions were taking place in each group*” (Researcher, Researcher Notes,
January, 2012). Also documented in the field notes were 62 references to the term ‘fun’ or ‘enjoyment’ (Researcher, Researcher Notes, January, 2012). Data that provided additional support for the subtheme of enjoyment were evident in the comments from students engaged in model-building.

*I looked over the entire classroom as the students were building their model.*

*Each time I focused on an individual group, I heard participants say how much fun they were having. One student said that it was ‘energizing’ to learn about health promotion by building a model. Another student said that the model-building exercise made her want to get started on reading assignments and creating a blog ‘right now’* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

One comment in a student journal provided additional support for enjoyment as a behavior of student engagement and the data from the researcher’s field notes.

*I had so much fun building the model that I will remember that class for a long time. Yes, we laughed and joked, but we also learned about each other and where we are coming from. It was like I was being drawn into the activity because it had an air of being fun. I know that I participate more when I like what I am doing. I may not understand it fully, but now I can remember the parts of health promotion based on this activity! I will be more active in class when it is fun. I guess that making course requirements enjoyable for each student is one of those things that will automatically increase engagement* (Study Participant, Student Journal, March, 2012).

The student remarks, along with the researcher’s data, clearly supported the subtheme of enjoyment as a behavior of engagement.
The course leader provided insight supporting the subtheme of enjoyment by offering personal experience. Data from the interview supported other data previously described in this section.

We should not REQUIRE an assignment to support having fun or to be enjoyable as a mandatory aspect of student engagement because it seems like it should be common sense. However, I have watched the students’ actions from the start and learning should or must be fun for engagement to occur. It is well known that if you enjoy something then you are more likely to remember it and be more involved. In nursing, I observed this class of students having much more fun or enjoyment than any other class that I have seen. The way that they jumped into model-building was significant. As you [researcher] were explaining the activity, I saw small smiles turn into large smiles. I heard a few students say they were ready to start even before you were finished. They were eager, they were happy, and they were definitely engaged. Enjoying what you do is important. Without that, what’s the point? Enjoyment equals engagement in my opinion (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Other remarks from one of the participants reinforced enjoyment as a behavior of engagement and echoed the course leader’s comments.

I thought that building our own health promotion model was such a refreshing way as breaking the ice and spark interest in the course. I surprised myself by thoroughly enjoying the entire class. I usually participate in small group work with a positive attitude, but not much interest. It’s like, let’s get it over with so I can go home. With this activity, I did not watch the time because I was having so
much fun. Our group worked well together and we laughed and learned and made a good model (Sheila, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant’s remarks mirrored previous data and provided additional support for enjoyment as a behavior of engagement:

Sometimes I just make the best of it when we have to work in small groups, but with the model, I wanted to get involved. Everyone seemed to be having so much fun; I didn’t want to be left out. What a great way to be involved. The whole model-building thing was so creative and I could not help but be involved (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Accountability.

The second subtheme associated with behaviors of engagement was accountability. The researcher defined accountability as being able to answer to others who are involved in the same goal for actions one has agreed to perform. Accountability was evident in the comments from the open-ended questionnaire, researcher notes, and focus group transcript.

Accountability was specifically mentioned on four open-ended questionnaires.

The blog (tiered assignment), even though it was mine, made me realize that we all need to respond to each other’s blog. Here we [nursing students] are working on our own projects and I still feel the need to respond to other blogs. I think that we have a responsibility to do this for each other. It makes what we do more important (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).
Another response from the open-ended questionnaire indicated that the participant had a sense of accountability to self and to others. The remarks also supported the previous data.

*I felt very involved because of the blogs. I had a few people following me in this class and some outside of class. That made me want to keep posting because they were there waiting for my response or for me to post something new* (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Similar remarks from two other participants echoed support for accountability as a behavior of student engagement. One response highlighted that the participant was engaged due to a feeling of accountability for her own participation and a sense of accountability to other classmates. “I wanted to post to the blog or the circle because the other member of my group wanted to read my posts. I had to be engaged for myself and for them” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). Another questionnaire response corroborated the data. “My group depended on me to post at the right time as much as I did for them to post at the right time. It made me participate because I wanted to and they NEEDED me to do this” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

All remarks indicated that accountability was a behavior associated with engagement either out of a sense of duty to self and to classmates.

The focus group provided additional data related for accountability. One student commented:

*I had a sense of responsibility to my lit circles group. It was different than being in a group for a regular discussion board. I would post and move on. With the
circles, I had to be responsible for posting at the right time and to respond to the topic chosen by others. I felt like I had to be involved to keep the conversation going. That was a good thing (M’Lin, Focus Group, March, 2012).

In addition, another focus group participant voiced agreement with M’Lin, saying:

I also felt responsible to my group and to the people following my blog. If I missed a posting, I felt bad not only for myself, but for the other bloggers. The same thing was true for the circles. I wanted to respond because that is how to keep the circle going and because I did not want to let anyone down. I think that respect goes with accountability (Pam, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Data from all sources supported accountability as one of the subthemes associated with behaviors of student engagement.

Ownership.

The concept of ownership was identified as a behavior of student engagement based on data taken from the open-ended questionnaire, faculty interview, and the focus group transcript. Ownership was defined by the researcher as understanding that one has a personal responsibility for contributing to learning. Ownership refers to a sense of personal value for knowledge that one possesses.

Response from the open-ended questionnaire indicated that ownership was inherent as one of the behaviors of student engagement.

The DI projects made me take ownership for my education. I came to class thinking that all I had to do was just enough to get through the class. When I realized that I’m in charge. I could really put some work into the blog or I could be average and blah. I chose to put more information into the blog because it
was a representation of me. Once, I looked at it that way, my participation in the blog and even the literature circles improved (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Another participant reported that ownership required engagement.

The tiered assignment (blog) was mine. I had so much of me in it. I owned the blog! I was responsible for content. The blog required work to make it interesting so why not make it an example (Study Participant Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Data derived from the faculty interview supported ownership as a behavior of student engagement as well as reinforced data received from the open-ended questionnaire.

As I talked with each student regarding the tiered assignment, I repeatedly heard ‘I’ statements. I want this to be something that I can be proud of. I want the blog to be a vehicle for my story. I want to help others by sharing my experience. The students seemed to see the assignment as a means of conveying an individual story. Several students said that they took ownership of their work and put much more into the assignment than I ever envisioned (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

In addition, the course leader observed three study participants discussing the tiered assignment in terms of ownership.

Students used the term ownership frequently. They referred to ownership as how they viewed the assignment. One student commented that she did the assignment for the required points, but she felt tied to the assignment because of the personal
nature of her blog. She said that even though it was created for a specific class, she felt a sense of belonging toward the blog. It [the blog] was my electronic face (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

The course leader also reported that the term “ownership” was frequently used when class discussions occurred. Data from the course leader supported the subtheme of ownership as a vehicle for student engagement.

Participants in the focus group reported feeling a sense of ownership over course work that contained a significant amount of personal interest and experiences.

*Usually I complete an assignment wondering if I did what the instructor wanted, thinking what does she [instructor] want to see in my work. With differentiated instruction, I was thinking more about what I want to see in my work. I think it was because had more at stake here. I felt possessive of my blog and the content and I think I felt the same way about the parts of the health promotion model that we built. I guess that is ownership just as (participant name) was talking about before* (Michelle, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Other focus group participants noted that because the assignments were so personal there was a sense of identity associated with ownership.

*I put my mark on my postings for the literature circles because my response was mine alone. Nobody had the exact opinion that I did. When I put other students’ entries together with my own, I know that I was responsible for what I said . . . like being the owner of my personal thoughts* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant response not only echoed previous statements regarding ownership, but made connections between ownership and student engagement.
I felt responsible for what I said in my blog and lit circles. Those statements were mine and I could not blame anyone else but myself. I had ownership and that affected my participation in the class. I was much more aware of the details of each to the blog and lit circles. I felt that I originated an opinion and, because of that, I owned it. I was responsible to follow up with any discussion that might occur as a result of what I said. So I said even more than my usual level of participation (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).

In addition, other focus group members not only provided support for data identified above by mirroring the intent, but also stated that a sense of ownership of learning perpetuated student engagement that resulted in continuous dialogue among participants.

I was wed to what I said to on-line assignments and felt that I had to defend my words in a way that made me want to broaden the discussion so others could join in. When a topic that I introduced became an on-line discussion that had many people responding, I couldn’t help but feel that it was mine. When this happened, I wanted to participate more and more (Cierra, Focus Group, March, 2012).

Another participant voiced agreement. “I also felt responsible for a discussion that blossomed from a statement that I made. It was nice to have a feeling of being included and a feeling of possession instead of being on the fringe of a discussion” (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012). All sources of data provided support for ownership as a behavior contributing to student engagement.

Motivation.

Motivation was the fourth subtheme associated with behaviors of engagement. Participants demonstrated how motivation was instrumental in improving adult learner
engagement. Motivation, as defined by the researcher, refers to actions taken by the learner as a result of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that encourage involvement in learning. Findings that supported motivation as one of the behaviors of engagement were derived from tiered assignment (blogs), researcher notes, open-ended questionnaire, faculty interview, and focus group transcript.

Four of the participants’ blogs contained postings that identified motivation as being influential over content, quantity, and quality of information that was posted.

*I chose my blog topic because I was motivated to tell my story of what I was going through. Living with a spouse who has cancer is a journey. I think that I wanted to help others understand that they are not alone. I had to talk about it. I had to share what I experienced in support groups. When the tiered assignment was introduced, I ready to write and write. I know that my main reason for choosing my topic was to share my story, but I participated well above the requirements for the blog and that would not have happened if I wasn’t motivated to be involved on a personal level* (Study Participant, Tiered Assignment, March, 2012).

Blogs of three study participants cited personal experience and a captive audience as motivational factors that increased student engagement (Researcher, Researcher Notes, March 2012). The open-ended questionnaire provided support for data gleaned from the blogs and the subtheme of motivation. “The way that the course was so free and open gave me motivation to do a good job instead of an average job” (Study Participant, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012). Another response from a participant stated: “This was the first time I was motivated to do a better job because the DI techniques made it so easy to do more than I would have in other classes” (Study Participant, Open-ended
Both entries supported the finding that motivation was a behavior associated with student engagement.

One statement from the course leader clearly identified that behaviors related to motivation were displayed by the majority of the study participants.

*From the start, I watched the students’ faces perk up and take interest. They were listening and the beginning of smiles came across their faces. A few students told me that they were motivated to put extra effort into their work because the DI methods were so interesting. I even had to ask several students to scale down their tiered assignments because they were very intent on getting something out of it for themselves as well as informing others* (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

This statement supported the subtheme of motivation as a behavior of engagement in addition to data provided by the questionnaire.

Data from the focus group noted that motivation was apparent in ways not truly understood by the participants.

*I was thinking about it [blog] even when I was not thinking about it. That doesn’t make sense, but I found myself ready to respond or post something to the lit circles all the time! I think that the way everything came together made me a more active class member. I remember wondering in the middle of the day if someone had posted something new to their blog or if someone had responded to my comments in the literature circle. I was driven to be involved even when I had other things on my mind* (Kathy, Focus Group, March, 2012).
Other focus group participants were nodding heads in agreement as the participant offered her perspective. One of the group members stated:

*I think that I was motivated by the way the class was designed. I usually am motivated, if you could call it that, by wanting a good grade for the course. This time it was different. I was motivated to add to the class because it was different and there were not as many restrictions* (Jill, Focus Group, March, 2012).

**Creativity.**

Creativity was the most prevalent behavior of student engagement. Not only was creativity a key factor, many of the data sources contained references to the actions of creativity displayed by study participants. For the purpose of the study, creativity was defined by the researcher as the ability to make something intricate, complex, and visionary from simple, basic concepts and materials. Creativity, as a behavior of engagement, refers to how the student demonstrates innovation by expanding conventional thoughts or actions into a unique entity. All sources of data provided support for this subtheme.

All student journals contained one or more responses using the word creativity in reference to how and why student engagement in NURN 416 was affected. Students reported that being free to explore and expand their minds beyond conventional thought was an impetus for student engagement. Additional comments cited a need to grow and develop new skills and intelligences as a factor in promoting creativity (Study Participants, Student Journals, March, 2012).

The open-ended questionnaire provided ample support for creativity as a behavior of student engagement. All questionnaires contained the word ‘creativity’ as a major
component of successful student engagement. Students described how behavior was changed when creativity was employed. Statements from the students indicated that some developed creative skills in response to differentiated instructional techniques and others expanded creative abilities due to the nature of the DI techniques (Study Participants, Open-ended Questionnaire, March, 2012).

Field notes taken during the model-building exercise indicate that creativity was evident in behavior of students who were engaged in the activity (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

*I counted the number of times the word creativity and related derivatives were mentioned by members of the small groups involved in the activity. There were 46 references to the word ‘creative’ or ‘creativity’ within the first 15 minutes of the model building exercise. I see and hear students referring to creativity as a hidden behavior of engagement. The product of the exercise was different and entirely new for each group. When the students explained their model, it was apparent that each person wanted to explain their particular part of the work.*

*Every model was unique. Students used the craft supplies in ways I would never be able to do* (Researcher, Field Notes, January, 2012).

Tiered assignment (blog) and literature circles promoted creativity as evident by the intricacy and complexity of each course requirement. Technological skills, either possessed or developed by the student, played a part in supporting creativity. It was evident to the researcher that both assigned activities involved creativity due to the ornate nature of the blog and the detail of the content. The literature circles also involved
creativity when students coordinated several complex themes in order to find closure in the issues explored (Researcher, Researcher Notes, March, 2012).

The course leader made reference to creativity frequently during the interview, and the data from the interview supported the researcher’s notes and the premise of creativity as a behavior of engagement.

_This entire experience was so different than any other class experience that I have had. The students were so creative right from the start. The first class in which they had to build a model of health promotion from scratch was eye-opening. All of the groups did things with the concepts or art supplies that I could not imagine. I think that the type of in-class activity really promoted creativity and when creativity is at its peak, engagement should be at its peak. The discussion of tiered assignments was even creative. Students came to me with ideas that were very new, not just the routine method of delivery or copy-cat thinking. Even the discussion among the small groups demonstrated that DI techniques require creativity_ (Course Leader, Faculty Interview, March, 2012).

Findings from data from the focus group transcript provided additional support for creativity as a behavior of engagement as well as echoing data from other sources listed in this section.

_This whole class was built on creativity! Everything to do with differentiated instruction had to be creative. If the goal was to improve student participation, then creativity did that for me. I had a chance to do that with everything I did_ (Margie, Focus Group, March, 2012).
In addition, a total of 91 references to creativity as a significant component that had an impact on student engagement were found. A participant provided support for the finding by remarking:

*I was so happy to use some part of my brain that controls the creative gene. Not that other classes are mediocre, but this one used something that I am good at – being creative. I felt so much more a part of the class and I know that I heard my group members use the word many times. If I had to choose one thing from this class that I would remember a long time from now, it would be how creative the whole experience was for me* (M’Lin, Focus Group, March, 2012).
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, each of the major themes and subthemes are explored. Thereafter, recommendations are made. Finally, conclusions are outlined.

Valuing the Student and Related Subthemes

One of the key findings of the study was the importance of students’ feeling valued. Valuing the student incorporated the student’s perspective, and placed a degree of importance on it equal to the importance of the views of faculty, other students, and experts from the text and other resources. The subtheme of personhood recognized personal interests, opinions, and experiences of participants as important to this theme. A learning environment for the non-traditional, adult learner should capitalize on the knowledge that is gained from years of work experience and life experience, since it may enhance the learning experience for self and others. What better method of encouraging student engagement than to promote learning experiences and activities that allow for one to offer unique opinions based on personal experience and interest? Students may relate to the experiences of other students and feel compelled to offer a different perspective. This is a point supported by Knowles (1978), who postulated that teachers should not necessarily think of a student as a blank slate, but consider individual experiences as valuable knowledge as well. By acknowledging and encouraging a student to share
the unique components of personal interests, experiences, and opinions, the student is
more likely to fully engage in the learning activities of a course.

Personal experiences provide context to learning. By contextualizing student
learning, a greater appreciation and understanding of learning may be achieved. Students
should be encouraged to bring their uniqueness to the classroom so that other students
may be enlightened and inspired to increase participation within the course. Cornelius,
Gordon and Ackland (2011) underscored this view by emphasizing that each student
must have context in order to fully appreciate new knowledge. This finding was also
supported by McGrath (2009), who indicated that students are more involved in learning
if they are acknowledged as individuals with much to offer. In sum, educators must
acknowledge personhood in order to increase student engagement in learning and to
promote the value of the student.

The voice of the student emerged as another subtheme in relation to the theme of
valuing the student. The voice of the student was the means by which he or she was
understood and defined. This premise was noted by McArdle and Mansfield (2007) who
found that students are more likely to participate in learning activities if their voices are
heard and acknowledged. Caminotti and Gray (2012) also indicated that the voice of the
student is integral to increasing participation in learning activities. Differentiated
instructional techniques used in this study allowed the study participants to express
thoughts and feelings in a unique way, knowing that their contributions were respected
and welcomed. The unique voice that each student possessed was acknowledged when
differentiated instructional techniques were used.
The subthemes of voice and personhood were interrelated. Both emphasized the importance of acknowledging the individual and unique participant perspective when implementing teaching techniques commonly associated with differentiated instruction. The voice of the student was critical to establishing the value of the individual, a point supported by Brookfield (2006). Having a voice that is given equal attention and equal standing with voices of other students and faculty, gave students a sense of value. McArdle and Mansfield (2007) supported this point, indicating that student voice is a key factor in promoting positive student outcomes. Giving students a definitive and respected voice within the learning environment appears to enhance engagement.

A third subtheme related to valuing the student was self-awareness. Findings of the study indicated that the participants became aware of their individual strengths and limitations when given an opportunity to choose assignments. They capitalized on their known abilities or strengths by engaging in learning activities that provided an opportunity to use them. At the same time, they did not seem reluctant to develop new skills or to try something new. This idea was evident in the work of Gardner (2011), who found that non-traditional, adult learners choose a particular option for the tiered assignment after mentally reviewing personal abilities, needs, limitations, and boundaries. Similarly, Erikson (2009) and Roeser and Park (2009) supported self-awareness of one’s strengths and limitations as being a necessity in order for individuals to make informed choices involving learning. Knowing self is integral to increasing student engagement in learning (Knowles, 1984).
Choice emerged as a fourth subtheme. Choice was related to personhood in that it encompassed student personal interest, experience, and opinions that influence the decision-making process. Choice was related to self-awareness, as well. In order to make meaningful choices, students had to be aware of their abilities. Students appeared especially receptive to choice and the result was an increase in student engagement in learning activities. Baum (2010), and Fenerty and Tiger (2010), supported this finding, noting that incorporating choice into the learning environment fosters an increase in participation or engagement. Sherling (2011) extended this thought, saying that using teaching techniques that allow students to make choices of learning activities promotes critical thinking.

The final subtheme related to valuing the student focused on personal skills and multiple intelligences. Allowing a student to integrate self-selected personal skills such as Gardner’s multiple intelligences demonstrated respect and value for what the student had to offer. Students were more engaged in learning when integrating their skills/intelligences into class assignments, such as tiered assignment and literature circles. Findings from a recent study echoed this premise. Cornelius, et al., (2011) found that adult students participated in class activities and class projects more actively when given the opportunity to select a learning activity that utilized a skill with which the student was well versed. Skills and multiple intelligences also are a means of valuing the student by allowing the student to expand or explore new skills. Students who chose to incorporate a new, undeveloped skill into a learning activity did so with the understanding that failure was still considered learning, and that there was value in learning regardless of the
outcome. Students were encouraged to develop new skills or intelligences in order to meet course objectives. In doing so, students believed that their contributions to the class were valued because they were allowed to explore new skills, not based strictly on competency for using the new skill. Gardner (2006) found similar results.

**Framing and Related Subthemes**

The concept of framing has been accepted as an important component of adult education (Gardener, 2006). Findings from this study supported framing as a key factor that positively influenced student engagement in learning. The subthemes of making meaning and context were also found to be integral to engagement. This finding is supported by Mezirow’s contention that by including adult learners’ experiences, making meaning is achieved through a combination of making meaning and using context to illuminate a specific concept (1991). Adult learners appear to thrive when drawing on past events, experiences, and/or concepts in order to frame a specific learning experience. Research conducted by Stuckey (2009) also supported this finding by indicating that making meaning is essential for adult learning and that learners must place learning within the framework of one’s existence.

Findings from the study indicated that the subtheme of context was an important vehicle for increasing student engagement. Non-traditional, adult learners benefited from being able to insert past knowledge into a new learning situation to create a context that enhanced learning, a point supported by Hunter (2008). Past knowledge served to illuminate new knowledge so that the adult learner could place a degree of value and importance on new knowledge. Satisfaction and confidence were gained from placing
knowledge within a framework of an individual life, as a means of finding value in the knowledge. McGrath (2009) supported this finding by indicating that student engagement was improved via framing and making meaning and context that allowed for, and in some cases, required self disclosure. By disclosing personal experience and relating the experience to the current situation, student engagement increased.

**Learning Environment**

Findings from the study supported the need for a safe learning environment so that student engagement was encouraged. Students must feel a sense of trust in persons in the learning environment. Non-traditional, adult learners have a multitude of life experiences and knowledge to share with other students (Gardner, 1999). Creating a learning environment that has respect for the individual and all that is unique to that individual was necessary as a foundation for increasing student engagement. Non-traditional, adult learners had very specific opinions that were expressed. This finding was supported by Call (2007), who indicated failure to allow such expression would stifle the student, and possibly, impair learning. A learning environment that welcomes respectful dissent may be the foundation necessary for a healthy exchange of ideas in which intellectual growth is achieved.

Safety in the learning environment requires ground rules that breed reciprocal respect for each participant (Call, 2007). Differentiated instructional techniques thrive in this environment and bring about a level of comfort for the student. The findings of this study support the premise that as comfort and trust in the learning environment grow in the eyes of the student, so does the amount and depth of participation.
The subtheme of freedom was closely related to a safe learning environment. Providing a learning environment in which students were free to call upon such experiences was necessary for increasing student engagement. It was also found that freedom to speak without fear of repercussion was a requirement for a conducive learning environment. Freedom that was built into the design of an assignment or class activity brought about a level of comfort that allowed the student to feel safe and comfortable, a point supported by Pierro, Presaghi, Higgins, and Kruglanski (2009). The researchers found that freedom was integral to a student’s well being by ensuring that one was able to participate without fear of repercussion. The findings of this study indicated safety and comfort were related to freedom by giving credence to knowledge that the adult learner had attained over time.

Structure of the course, another finding related to the learning environment, was found to be critical to student engagement. The non-traditional, adult learner required a course structure and learning activities that promoted many of the components previously discussed in this section. The structure of each of the differentiated instructional techniques included: a degree of freedom, ample opportunity for engagement, and opportunity for students to make decisions about learning activities. The components are integral to teaching adults in a manner that maximizes the knowledge, experience, and skills that they bring to the classroom. In support of this finding, Pierro, et al., (2009), found that participation and learning improved when a course was structured to encourage students to share their personal learning with classmates.

Forced engagement was the fourth subtheme related to the learning environment. This term was coined by several of the participants. When searching for supporting
literature, few studies were found in relation to this finding. One, by Henderson (2009), made reference to participation requirements that encouraged students to be engaged in the class or face penalties pertaining to the course grade achieved. Forced engagement provided a starting point for the adult learner to increase the level of participation in the course. Each subtheme derived from the data was important to consider when creating a learning environment that promoted engagement.

**Non-Traditional Teaching Techniques**

The importance of integrating non-traditional teaching techniques into non-traditional, adult education in nursing cannot be ignored. Non-traditional techniques, such as differentiated instructional techniques used in this study, were instrumental in increasing student engagement. Model-building, tiered assignment, and literature circles relied on student participation in order for these teaching methods to be successful. Students who embraced differentiated instructional techniques reported a positive impact on involvement. Participants welcomed teaching techniques that were new to their learning experience and not repetitious of other teaching strategies. Research studies have supported faculty efforts to create learning experiences that utilize effective teaching techniques that promote greater critical thinking and student engagement (Brown, Kirkpatrick, Greer, Matthias, & Swanson, 2009).

“Out-of-the-box” thinking was the first subtheme to emerge related to non-traditional teaching techniques. Study participants used this term repeatedly. They indicated a desire to learn in unconventional ways and welcomed non-traditional teaching techniques. They said that having “out-of-the-box” teaching techniques spurred their thinking and learning in ways they formerly had not considered. They found each
differentiated instructional technique used in the course to be innovative and non-traditional. In support of this finding, a study by Wikstrom (2011) noted that innovative teaching techniques appeal to the needs of the adult learner and promote greater participation in the classroom. Similarly, research by Phillips and Linton (2011) indicated that students tend to readily accommodate new educational techniques and learning activities and are fully able to participate in them.

Acknowledging the needs of adult learners and designing learning experiences that promote engagement included the concept of control over learning. Adult learners accumulate a large knowledge base via traditional education and life experience and need to integrate this information into their learning. The design of each assignment or learning activity was constructed with the needs of adult learners in mind and intended to empower them. Participants indicated that having control over assignments had a positive impact on engagement. This point was supported by research conducted by Davidson, Metzger, and Lindgren (2011) who identified control over learning as a factor that should be present when designing course work. As pointed out by Walker and others (2007), adult learners have the background and the skills to determine the direction of learning that provide personal meaning, as well as meet course requirements.

Educational activities in the course incorporated both concepts of control over learning and self-directed learning to achieve a positive impact on student engagement. Acknowledging and respecting student input into their learning activities was a key component of differentiating instruction. Findings demonstrated that participants responded positively to opportunities to direct their learning and that their participation improved as they became comfortable in making decisions about how they would
approach a learning activity. The results have been supported by other studies. Cadorin, Dante, and others (2012) indicated that adult learners have the ability to create a personal agenda of learning if given enough control to accomplish this task. Mooney and Nolan (2006) extended this thinking, noting that students flourish when they become accustomed to creating individual products of learning that are uniquely individual.

**Behaviors of Engagement and Related Subthemes**

Five subthemes constituted the theme of behavior of engagement: enjoyment, accountability, ownership, motivation, and creativity. Each subtheme appeared to promote engagement. Enjoyment was critical for students to begin to engage in learning. Study participants who expressed enjoyment in learning activities appeared more involved in the course. This view has been supported by Gardner (1999), who indicated that learning activities that are designed with adult needs in mind are more likely to create satisfaction. Enjoyment is a basic human need that should be inherent in any learning activity.

Accountability and ownership were interrelated subthemes. Participants were ready to accept responsibility for learning and appeared to thrive in terms of engagement. The students have life experiences that have created a sense of accountability, as well as a sense of ownership of individual actions. This finding is supported by research by Hegge and others (2010) who postulated that the adult learner has gained a sense of responsibility to self and to others for being active within the learning environment.

Motivational factors were important to each participant. Responsibility to self and classmates, along with aspirations for academic success, were among the most influential. The participants were more engaged in learning activities when mindful of
motivational factors. In support of this point, Roeser and Peck (2009) found that adult learners require internal and external factors as motivation for learning. Hidle (2011) echoed this finding, noting adult learners to be highly motivated when mindful of factors affected by academic success or failure.

Participants in the study were also motivated by the content and type of learning activity, such as tiered assignment and literature circles. Increasing complexity of postings and responses to the literature circles and blogs, as well as numbers of postings and responses far exceeding course requirements reflected this point. Students who were highly motivated reported being engaged via planning future learning experiences and by being fully attentive to input from other students. This finding was supported by research by Halx (2010), citing motivational factors of learning content and type of learning activity as most crucial to learning.

The final subtheme of behaviors of engagement was creativity. Non-traditional, adult learners in this study described creativity as one of the most important aspects of their participation. Unique input, futuristic thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in unconventional ways emerged through differentiated instruction. Numerous studies have supported the importance of creativity for increasing participation and learning (Currie, Biggam, Palmer, & Corcoran, 2012; Kipp, Pimlott, & Satzinger, 2007; Knox, 2011; Stuckey, H., 2009).

Recommendations

Given the interest in this research by the dean of the college and program faculty of the RN-BSN at the institution in which this study was conducted, the researcher should organize a discussion of the findings, in short order. Including study participants, who
would be willing to volunteer to participate, would be desirable. Consideration should focus on the three methods of differentiated instruction and the potential for enhancing levels of engagement in other similar courses. How other differentiated methods, not included in this study, might be used in courses should be examined. Whether or not DI methods should be tried in less process-oriented, more didactic courses would be a useful conversation, as well. DI may be more suitable for some courses than others.

Further research on the use of DI methods and the impact on student engagement should be undertaken. An ideal study, while improbable given where students are in the program, would be to employ the same methods in a different course with the same participants. It would be interesting to add other DI methods to see if they would produce similar results to the three used in the current study. Of greater interest would be to see if the novelty of the three methods would wear off with this group, resulting in any decline in the level of engagement over time.

Other studies of value might include: training other nursing faculty in DI methods to determine whether or not faculty would have similar results in other courses; increasing the number of study participants to see if similar results would occur; or exploring each of the themes and subthemes in greater depth and over time, to determine if the same themes and subthemes emerge in other settings and if the same interrelationships appear. Conducting quantitative studies that measure student levels of engagement prior to, during, and after the use of DI methods would be informative.

The use of DI techniques should be expanded. The techniques should be implemented in other undergraduate nursing courses and in graduate courses in the
School of Nursing. Finally, since engaging in learning is a priority in all of higher education, DI techniques should be explored in other disciplines in the university.

**Conclusions**

Students in an RN-BSN program can find greater meaning in learning by using differentiated instructional techniques that are student-focused and allow students to design learning assignments. Non-traditional, adult learners in this study showed interest and enthusiasm in the three differentiated instructional techniques used in this course. They indicated that these approaches to learning were different than what they had experienced in previous courses and led them to be freer to self-direct and create learning activities of greater personal interest.

In addition, the scope and depth of their exploration of content was far beyond what they ordinarily experienced. So, too, was the extent of interaction with peers in the course, as they felt freer to express their opinions given a safe and open environment. In sum, the use of differentiated instruction had a positive impact on engagement.
REFERENCES


Davidson, S. C., Metzger, R., & Lindgren, K. S. (2011). A hybrid classroom online curriculum format for RN-BSN students: cohort support and curriculum structure


Mann, R. (2008). *Differentiated strategies to meet the needs of high ability students*. Unpublished manuscript, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.


Health Promotion Across the Lifespan

NURB 416 – 50

University of Indianapolis

School of Nursing

Semester II, 2011-12
# Syllabus

NURN 416 Syllabus 2011-12, Semester II

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Course Information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalog Description</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Objectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topical Outline</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Methods</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Texts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading Scale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities Statement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Overview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Calendar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course and Unit Objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit I</strong> Introduction to Health Promotion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Assessment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson Case Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables for Holistic Family Assessment (Neuman)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention as Intervention (Neuman)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Health History Tools</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Pluralism Exercises</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit II</strong> Health Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit III</strong> Growth and Development Across the Lifespan</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Stages Summary</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit IV</strong> Secondary Prevention (Screening)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit V</strong> Stress Management Counseling</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit VI</strong> Nutrition Counseling</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit VII</strong> Exercise Counseling</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit VIII</strong> Holistic Health Care Strategies</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerPoint Presentation and Evaluation Criteria</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Paper</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Paper Evaluation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloom’s Taxonomy: Cognitive Domain</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloom’s Taxonomy: Psychomotor Domain</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloom’s Taxonomy: Affective Domain</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloom’s Taxonomy</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Indianapolis  
School of Nursing  
BSN Program
COURSE NUMBER: NURN 416  
COURSE NAME: Health Promotion Across the Lifespan  
PLACEMENT IN CURRICULUM: 400 Level, Semester II  
PREREQUISITES: All 300 Level Courses  

FACULTY:  
Karen Hirsch, MSN, RN  
Assistant Professor  
Office: Martin Hall, Room 357  
Phone: 788-3424  
E-mail: khirsch@uindy.edu  

Ellen Davel, Ed.D., RN  
Adjunct Faculty  
E-mail: davele@uindy.edu

TIME ALLOTMENT: 7 credit hours

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:  
Health promotion is explored across the lifespan. A holistic approach is utilized to address the lifelong health requirements of diverse populations in the community. Knowledge of nursing, behavioral and physical sciences is integrated and applied when providing nursing care. Continued development of core competencies, core knowledge and role development is emphasized with primary focus on disease prevention/health promotion.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Upon successful completion of all course work and experiences of NURN 416, the student will:

1. evaluate holistic care with diverse health care recipients throughout the lifespan in various environments; (critical thinking)  
2. synthesize knowledge, research and theory from nursing and related sciences to nursing practice; (critical thinking)  
3. evaluate critical thinking skills demonstrated in the care of health care recipients in a variety of environments; (critical thinking)  
4. utilize the nursing process in providing care to health care recipients; (critical thinking)
5. analyze professional nursing acts that facilitate collaboration in the care of health care recipients; (performance)
6. analyze nursing roles utilized in the delivery of care for health care recipients; (performance)
7. evaluate the use of effective communication skills in multiple nursing roles with health care recipients, members of the health care team, and members in the community; (performance)
8. evaluate therapeutic communication techniques in health care recipient interactions; (critical thinking)
9. integrate ethical principles into nursing practice; (social responsibility)
10. integrate the use of legal principles in nursing practice; (performance)
11. evaluate strategies to manage human, fiscal, and material resources; (social responsibility)
12. construct plans of care that acknowledge all resources available to the health care recipient; and (creativity)
13. evaluate own responsibility for professional development. (social responsibility)
TOPICAL OUTLINE:

UNIT I.  Introduction to Health Promotion
A. Health Promotion
B. Ethnicity, Values and Value Orientation
C. HIV and AIDS Prevention Among Minorities
D. Review of Family Theory
E. Family Health Promotion

UNIT II.  Health Education
A. Health Counseling
B. Readiness for Change
C. Health Belief Model
D. Teaching Plans
E. Healthy People 2020 Objectives
F. Community Resources

UNIT III.  Growth and Development Across the Lifespan
A. Developmental Levels
B. Health Promotion Concerns

UNIT IV.  Secondary Prevention (Screening)
A. Screening Issues
B. Common Screenings
C. Ethical Considerations
D. Healthy People 2020 Objectives

UNIT V.  Stress Management Counseling
A. Stress and Coping Process
B. Stress Management
C. Healthy People 2020 Objectives
D. Community Resources

UNIT VI.  Nutrition Counseling
A. Healthy People 2020 Objectives
B. Dietary Guidelines, Plan and Supplements
C. Common Nutritional Problems and Considerations
D. Community Resources

UNIT VII.  Exercise Counseling
A. Healthy People 2020 Objectives
B. Exercise Counseling Considerations
C. Community Resources
D. Interventions
E. Prescriptions and Benefits
UNIT VIII. Holistic Health Care Strategies

A. Holism
B. Health Practices
C. Holistic Health Practice Considerations
D. Community Resources
LEARNING METHODS:

- Lecture/Discussions
- Student PowerPoint Presentations
- Family Assessments and Screenings
- Case Studies
- Family Teaching Project
- Scholarly Paper
- On-Line Quizzes

REQUIRED TEXT:


REFERENCE TEXTS:


METHODS OF EVALUATION:

- Discussion Forums
- Family Health Promotion Project or Health Promotion Blog
- On-Line Presentations
- Scholarly Paper

GRADING SCALE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 – 96</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95 – 93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 – 90</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89 – 87</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 78</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 – 75</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 – 72</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 – 69</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68 – 66</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 – ↓</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COURSE GRADE:

Minimal passing grade for NURN 416 is determined by an average of 78% on the project, student led presentations, paper, and report. Students must also complete a minimum of 40 hours of practicum and meet course requirements.
ATTENDANCE POLICY:

It is expected that the student will attend all classroom sessions. According to university policy, excessive absences can result in an administrative withdrawal from or failure of a course (Academic Catalog 2011-2013). Excessive absences for classroom attendance are defined for this course as more than one class period not attended. An absence is defined as not attending any portion or all of the class session (late/leave early).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please inform class leader immediately so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. Students with a disability must register with the Services for Students with Disabilities office (SSD) in Schwitzer Center 201 (317-788-3297 / www.uindy.edu/ssd/ for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations. You are responsible for initiating arrangements for accommodations for tests and other assignments in collaboration with the SSD and the faculty.

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR:

Students are expected to attend and arrive punctually at all classes as well as participate in all classroom and on-line learning experiences. Deductions from the final course grade (5%) will be made for excessive absences. Excessive absence for NURN 416 is defined as failure to attend more than one on campus class.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

NURN 416, Health Promotion Across the Lifespan builds on assessment of health care recipients across the lifespan and includes the development of strategies to promote wellness in multiple environments. A holistic approach is utilized to provide therapeutic support and promote well being of the mind, body, and spirit. The course practicum addresses health care recipients from diverse populations in both community and acute care settings. Key concepts of the BSN conceptual framework are integrated throughout the course.

Professional practice issues and health care trends are examined to provide an understanding of health care needs and the health care system within a cultural and global
context. The Healthy People 2020 Objectives and Leading Health Indicators provide the framework for further study of the nursing, biomedical, developmental and psychological theories, which support nursing actions for health care recipients. Assigned readings and class discussions emphasize the use of critical thinking skills to solve problems found in nursing practice.
NURN 416 Health Promotion Across the Lifespan

THURSDAY CLASS COURSE CALENDAR

Week of January 19, 2012 (On Campus)
Course Orientation
Unit I: Introduction to Health Promotion

Week of January 26, 2012 (On Campus)
Unit II: Health Education

Week of February 2, 2012 (On-Campus)
Continue with Units I and II
Unit III: Growth & Development Across the Lifespan
Unit IV: Screenings

Response to all Unit I & II Discussion Forums due by 11:00 p.m.

Week of February 9, 2012 (On-Line)
Unit V: Stress Management Counseling
Unit VI: Nutritional Counseling

Week of February 16, 2012 (On-Line)
Unit VII: Exercise Counseling
Unit VIII: Holistic Health Care Strategies

February 23, 2012 (On-Line)
PowerPoint Presentations – must be posted by 4:30 p.m.
Response to all G & D Literature Circles due by 11:00 p.m.

March 1, 2012 (On-Line)
Scholarly Paper Due – submit electronically to the instructor.
Response to PowerPoint Presentations Due by 11:00 p.m.

March 8, 2012 (On Campus)
Final Projects Due
Discussion of PowerPoint Presentations

***Please be aware that weather issues may alter our on-campus class schedule. Please keep your Thursdays open in case of rescheduling.