

THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION ON FIFTH GRADE
GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out if the use of differentiated instruction would enhance the learning achievement of gifted and talented students in reading. This research was conducted with five students, three boys and two girls, in a fifth grade reading class in Lisbon, Iowa. Data sources such as a pretest, surveys, journaling, interviews, and observation were used. There was evidence showing that curriculum differentiation had a positive impact on the students, however the data did not suggest that curriculum differentiation improved their level of motivation.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out if the use of differentiated instruction would enhance the learning achievement of gifted and talented students in my classroom. For the seven years since I had begun teaching, I had focused most of my energy planning lessons for grade-level and below grade-level students. I felt it was time to place my effort into challenging students who had long been neglected.

Through research, I found I was not the only one neglecting the needs of gifted and talented students. The students receiving the most attention of teachers, school districts, politicians, and community members are those who are below grade-level. According to Winebrenner (2000), “students who fail to achieve the designated standards have received unprecedented attention during the past several years” (¶ 8). School districts spend tremendous amounts of money offering numerous special services for these low-achieving students and making sure they experience lower student-teacher ratios. Teachers are expected to create differentiated instruction by adjusting the amount of work, depth, complexity, and content of their curriculum. Politicians, community members, and teachers avidly follow the progress of these students, looking for evidence that the students are indeed making progress. Winebrenner (2000) stated that gifted students have natural learning abilities that place them as far from average as their classmates who struggle to learn. Based on this, they deserve to receive the same types of differentiation so readily available to low-achieving students.

It is not that teachers are opposed to differentiating their instruction; in fact, many teachers try to alter their curriculum, but later abandon their attempts. One reason for this is teachers already face tremendous pressure to teach an unmanageable amount of curriculum in a relatively short amount of time. Second, teachers are concerned about the overemphasis put on test results. Teachers also complain about the lack of time they have to devote to individual student interests and learning styles (Kapusnick & Hauslein, 2001). According to Winebrenner (2000), a reason many teachers don't differentiate their instruction is because there is a lack of teacher training and support. Other teachers worry that other students or parents will accuse them of unfairness. Last, some teachers truly believe that providing differentiation for higher-level students is elitist.

The reasons listed above were not new to me; in fact, I shared many of the same concerns about differentiating instruction. Research shows, however, that for gifted and talented students to be successful in school, differentiated instruction is necessary.

Throughout my seven years of teaching, I had tried to differentiate my curriculum in as many areas as possible. One subject I had always differentiated is spelling. I had tried acceleration with several students, letting them work through the spelling book at their own pace and moving them ahead to the next book when they finished. For one student who was significantly above grade-level in spelling, I designed a spelling book especially for her that was based on learning the definitions to words and idioms. I had also differentiated instruction in reading by allowing high-achieving students to do alternate activities when other students were completing

workbook pages. Prior to the beginning of this study, I had also tried differentiation in English, by allowing students to take pretests to determine their skill level before beginning a unit. On days when the class was covering material my gifted students had already mastered, students worked on alternate activities. I hoped my research would extend my knowledge of differentiated instruction, while encouraging me to use it in my classroom in more than just isolated incidences.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, a score at or above the 80th percentile on a vocabulary and skills pretest determined whether a student was *gifted and talented*. This designation was in line with the definition of gifted and talented students as those “...who have ability in one or more learning areas that exceeds grade/age level expectations...” (Winebrenner, 2001, p. 9). To *differentiate instruction*, a teacher changes the pace, level, or type of instruction to meet the needs, styles, or interests of students (Heacox, 2002). When a teacher uses *curriculum compacting*, they are finding a student’s area of strength, pretesting to determine how much of the curriculum the student already knows, giving them full credit for that content, and allowing them to work on more challenging activities instead of the grade-level work (Winebrenner, 2001).

Context for the Study

I conducted this action research project in my fifth grade classroom at Lisbon Elementary School in Lisbon, Iowa. The classroom had a blend of socioeconomic statuses, however it was made up entirely of Caucasian individuals. The students in my study were between the ages of 10 and 11. I taught two sections of reading,

English, and spelling. One of the sections was taught in the morning, while the other was taught in the afternoon. The subjects for my study were from my morning section, which had 19 students.

Review of Related Literature

Because I was trying to validate that differentiated instruction enhances learning for gifted and talented students, my literature review focuses on three main areas. First, I will discuss what happens when gifted and talented students aren't challenged. Second, I will describe ways teachers can differentiate their curriculum, focusing primarily on curriculum compacting. Lastly, I will show how the use of differentiated instruction can motivate the gifted and talented learner.

There are many adjectives one thinks of when describing high-achieving students: smart, curious, self-motivated, independent, etc. Winebrenner (2001), however, discussed another set of characteristics often found with gifted and talented students. These are characteristics often found with whom she calls the gifted underachievers. These are students who "...are easy to label—'lazy,' 'not working up to their potential,' 'poor attitude,' 'unproductive'—but hard to understand" (p. 2). Winebrenner went on to state that the problem is not with the students, but with the teachers instead. After taking a course on preventing underachievement, Winebrenner quoted her former teacher, Dr. Sylvia Rimm, by saying:

The surest path to high self-esteem is to be successful at something you perceived would be difficult. Each time we steal our students' struggle by insisting they do work that is too easy for them, we steal their opportunity to

have an esteem-building experience. Unless kids are consistently engaged in challenging work, they will lose their motivation to work hard. (p. 2)

The characteristics Winebrenner described are negative behavior patterns gifted and talented students can easily fall into when not challenged enough. Reis, Burns, and Renzulli (1992) added that because gifted students so often have to relearn material they have already mastered, the result is that it "...can lead to frustration, boredom and ultimately, underachievement" (p. 2) for these students. "Instead of completing work quickly that they know they have already mastered, [students] sometimes become disenchanted, mentally dropout and fail to finish even the simplest of assignments" (Siegle, 1999, p. 14).

Differentiated instruction is based on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1991; 1993). He asserted that "students learn better and more easily when teachers use a variety of delivery methods, providing students with learning experiences that maximize their strengths" (Kapusnick & Hauslein, 2001, ¶ 4). In her article on differentiating instruction for middle school students, Tomlinson (1995) stated that:

If middle students differ in readiness, interest, and learning profiles, and if a good middle school attempts to meet each student where he or she is and foster continual growth, a one-size-fits-all method of instruction makes little sense. Rather, differentiated instruction seems a better solution for meeting the academic diversity that typifies the middle school years. (p. 3)

Tomlinson went on to caution teachers about what differentiating is not. She stated that just adjusting the level of difficulty of questions for some students, grading

them harder than others, or letting students who finish early play enrichment games are not means of differentiating instruction. Advanced learners should not be given extension work in addition to the regular work. “Asking students to do ‘the regular work, plus’ inevitably punishes them” (Tomlinson, 1995, p. 3).

There are many ways a teacher can differentiate instruction. In general, adjustments are made based on interest, learning profile, or student readiness (Tomlinson, 1995). Kapsnick and Hauslein (2001) identified the eight most common strategies for differentiation: acceleration, curriculum compacting, independent study, flexible grouping, independent-learning centers, complex questioning, tiered objectives/activities, and learning contracts. For my action research, I concentrated on curriculum compacting.

Siegle (1999) suggested compacting both basic skills and course content. During a study conducted at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, Siegle explained compacting to a group of middle school students. He explained that their teacher would be testing them to see what school material they already knew. For material they had previously mastered, they would not be required to complete the corresponding assignments. One of the students replied, “‘Well, that just makes sense’” (¶ 11). Curriculum compacting does make sense. Why require students to complete assignments on material they have already mastered?

High-achieving students can become gifted underachievers because so much of what they learn in school is material they have already mastered. Just how much, was a question Reis (1992) tried to answer in a study she conducted in 20 school districts across the country. She wanted to determine just how much curriculum content could

be eliminated for high-achieving students. She also studied the effects of curriculum compacting on students' achievement test scores. One of her findings was that teachers could eliminate as much as 50% of the regular curriculum for gifted students with no differences to their ITBS scores. In fact, on the Math Concepts and Science sections of the ITBS, students actually scored higher as compared to students with whom compacting was not implemented. Reis' study demonstrated that curriculum compacting could be implemented in the regular classroom to provide more appropriate educational experiences.

In another article, Renzulli and Reis (1998), discussed additional benefits to curriculum compacting for gifted and talented students. They stated that allowing students to learn more about what they were interested in gave them not only a feeling of choice and control, but also one of enjoyment. They also observed that when some previously bright but underachieving students realized they could both economize on regularly assigned material and "earn time" to pursue self-selected interests, their motivation to complete regular assignments increased.

Winebrenner (2001) has seen similar effects on students. She found that students who had previously been "going through the motions" suddenly became actively engaged in learning when curriculum compacting was used. She also found that sloppy, careless students started paying attention to the quality of their work. Last, by using curriculum compacting, bored, unmotivated students seemed to "wake up" and want to learn.

Probably the most recognizable difference gifted and talented students experience with curriculum compacting is an increase in intrinsic motivation. "The

crucial elements to enhancing intrinsic motivation emerge from students' perceptions of their place in the classroom" (Allenback, 1995, p. 14). Allenback also stated that curriculum compacting supports three main principles of intrinsic motivation. Curriculum compacting creates novelty, uncertainty, and challenges, provides instructional support, and promotes control opportunities. Compacting meets the first principle because it "...provides students with challenging, yet exciting activities they can pursue with high perceptions of competence and control" (p. 14). Teachers provide instructional support by "...monitoring the actions of the students, allowing them to manage their time and how they will investigate their topic of study" (p. 14). Because students choose enrichment activities to pursue during the time they saved by compacting, this encourages students' self-perceptions of control.

The use of compacting ensures that gifted and talented students will have a successful experience based on their individual abilities. This stimulates their internal perceptions of competence. Also, because teachers have eliminated the already learned material, students are able to focus on activities that are more meaningful to them (Allenback, 1995). Reis et al. (1992) stated that modifying both the pace and structure of instruction according to the individual student's needs are key elements in maximizing achievement, particularly for bright students. Such freedom to "...successfully accomplish a task designed around one's own interests inevitably promotes intrinsic motivation through self-perceptions of competence and control" (Allenback, 1995, p. 15).

In this literature review, I have shown that differentiated instruction enhances learning for gifted and talented students. I have explained what happens when gifted

and talented students aren't challenged. I have described ways teachers can differentiate their curriculum, my primary focus being curriculum compacting. Lastly, I have shown how the use of differentiated instruction can motivate the gifted and talented learner.

Statement of Focus of the Study

I believed that using curriculum compacting as a means of differentiating instruction would enhance gifted and talented students' learning achievement in my classroom. Following are research questions I pursued:

1. What type of impact would curriculum differentiation have on my gifted and talented students?
2. Would the use of curriculum differentiation improve my gifted and talented students' level of motivation?

There were a few limitations to this study. First, I only studied students that scored at or above the 80th percentile on a vocabulary and skills pretest. Even more limiting was the fact I only studied students from my morning section. I chose the morning section because it was 30 minutes longer each day. That gave the students enough time to complete the surveys, journals, and interviews I needed for my study; at the same time, it limited the amount of data I was be able to collect as that meant I only had five students for my study. Last, one of the main focuses of my study was the motivation level of gifted and talented students. Some students naturally have a high level of intrinsic motivation, which made it hard to show an increase by using differentiated instruction.

Despite these limitations, I felt this research was necessary and valid because the needs of the gifted and talented students in my classroom had long been neglected. In conclusion, I truly agree with the words of Reis et al. (1992): “All students need learning experiences appropriate to their individual abilities, interests, and learning styles. Individual uniqueness should be respected and provided for, and every effort should be made to adapt learning experiences to their development” (p. 62).

Methodology

Design

This action research attempted to study the effects of differentiated instruction on gifted and talented students in a fifth grade classroom. The research design for my study was primarily descriptive research, as I collected data in order to answer my research questions. This study took place over a six-week period of time at Lisbon Elementary School in the fall of 2004. There was one group of students (taken from my morning section) who were studied. The students were grouped according to their reading ability. The baseline data for this study was a pretest on vocabulary and skill work given before the unit began.

There were a few constraints to my study. There were several interruptions to the daily schedule. I also had a student who was often tardy or absent. These constraints needed to be addressed because most of the work completed by my gifted and talented students needed to be completed at school. Teacher absence was also a constraint that needed to be addressed in my study. It is difficult enough for a substitute teacher to manage a large group of students, let alone when several students are working independently.

Subjects

I chose to use the morning section of my 2004 class for this study. There were a total of 19 students. Five students were in L.E.O., my school's gifted and talented program, and two were in the resource program. There were seven girls and twelve boys. All 19 students were Caucasian and came from a variety of socioeconomic

backgrounds. According to ITBS records, the lowest overall student composite was 2.0 and the highest was 7.4, based on the Iowa Grade Equivalent scores.

I studied primarily gifted and talented students, however my subjects were not chosen based on their membership in our school's gifted and talented program. Instead, students were chosen based on their reading ability alone, which was demonstrated by a score at or above the 80th percentile on a vocabulary and skills pretest.

Of the 19 students in my class, 17 took the pretest. The remaining two students were excluded because they went to the resource room for reading and had a separate curriculum graded by the resource teacher.

Five of my nineteen students scored at or above the 80th percentile on the vocabulary and skills pretest. Three of my subjects were boys and two were girls. Student A was the only student not in the school's gifted and talented program. She came from a middle class family and lived with both parents. Student B, one of my male students, was also from a middle class family and lived with both parents. Student C was new to the school district during the 2004-2005 school year. He came from a single-parent home and lived with his mother. Before moving to Lisbon, he had attended a special school for gifted and talented students. He was often tardy or absent altogether. Student D's parents were also divorced, however both parents shared custody. He came from an upper-middle class family. Student E, my other female student, came from a middle class family and lived with both parents.

Instrumentation

There were several methods I used to measure the effectiveness of differentiated instruction on my students. These procedures included pretest scores, surveys, journaling, interviews, and observations.

At the beginning of my unit, I pretested any student wishing to see if they knew the vocabulary and skill work for the upcoming unit. Students who scored at or above the 80th percentile on the pretest were eligible for differentiated instruction. The pretest was an important instrument in my study because it validated the need for differentiated instruction in my classroom.

I also conducted confidential parent and student surveys during my study. The surveys included five questions with Likert-type responses. The first survey was given during week 1 of my study and focused on feelings the students and parents had about previous years' reading instruction (Appendixes A and B). This helped indicate the level of differentiated instruction needed. During the sixth week of my study, I again sent home student and parent surveys (Appendixes C and D). This time, I looked to see if student and parent attitudes towards their child's reading instruction had changed over the six-week period. This helped me to see if differentiated instruction had an impact on my students' attitudes towards learning.

Journaling completed by the students and myself was also essential to my study because it helped me to keep track of what was and was not working in my program. Differentiated instruction of this kind was very new to me and I needed to keep track of any changes that needed to be made for the next time I used it. I journaled twice a week, but I only expected students to journal once a week. I wanted

them to focus on questions or concerns they had, as well as things they liked/disliked about the program. I also wanted students to discuss their feelings about their reading curriculum when using differentiated instruction. Through journal entries, I predicted I would see an increase in students' level of motivation.

During the third and sixth week of my study, I conducted interviews with the students who were eligible for differentiated instruction. Similar to the surveys, the interview questions (Appendixes E and F) focused on students' attitudes towards their reading instruction, both during and after my study. I was also able to monitor the impact that differentiated instruction had on my students.

The last type of instrumentation I used was observation. This was a very effective method of finding out the level of impact that differentiated instruction had on my students. I was able to see first-hand their enthusiasm for learning. I was also able to see if their motivation for learning increased, as this was not the first reading unit of the year.

Procedures

To begin my study, I gave all students the option to take a pretest on the vocabulary and skills I was covering in my novel unit, *Old Yeller*. According to numerous sources, it is best for the pretest to be an existing posttest. The vocabulary posttest asked students to match the word to its definition. For the skills section of the pretest, I used questions from existing worksheets used in my *Old Yeller* unit because there was not an existing posttest.

Any student who scored at or above the 80th percentile on the vocabulary and skills pretest qualified for a Reading Skills and Vocabulary Contract (Appendix G).

The top part of the contract listed the concepts taught during the *Old Yeller* unit. A checkmark next to a concept meant the student did not score 80% or higher and was expected to join the rest of the class for instruction on the day the concept was taught. The middle part of the contract was filled in with the vocabulary words the student had not yet mastered as evidenced by the vocabulary pretest. At the bottom of the page was a list of activities the student was to complete in order to practice and then demonstrate their mastery of the vocabulary words.

Next, I met with all the students who qualified for the Reading Skills and Vocabulary Contract. At this meeting, they received a copy of the aforementioned contract, as well as the Contract for Permission to Read Ahead (Appendix H), Reading Activities Menu (Appendix I), the Daily Log of Extension Work (Appendix J), and the Working Conditions for Alternate Activities (Appendix K). Each of these contracts is described below.

Because eligible students were to read *Old Yeller* at an accelerated pace, the Contract for Permission to Read Ahead was necessary. This contract stipulated that students were not allowed to reveal any upcoming plot twists or endings. Also, if they heard other kids talking about the book and what might happen next, the contract stated they should avoid joining in.

When other students were either working on skill or vocabulary work, or reading with the class, eligible students completed activities from the Reading Activities Menu. The Reading Activities Menu provided high-achieving students with activities that extended the regular reading unit. Students were able to choose the activities they wanted to do. Students continued working on the activity until they

were finished, whether or not it was completed in one day. They recorded the dates when they began and ended each activity on the lines to the left of each activity.

Students were also able to come up with their own activities and ideas. Once the ideas were discussed with me, the activity was recorded in one of the blank spaces at the bottom.

The Daily Log of Extension Work was a form where students could record what they accomplished each day. At the beginning of each work period, students entered the date in the left column. In the center column, they wrote a brief description of the work they predicted they could accomplish during that work period. Then, at the end of the end of the work period, they completed the right column by recording the amount of work they actually accomplished.

The Working Conditions for Alternate Activities form set the guidelines that students were to follow when working on their reading activities. If students would have had significant trouble abiding by the working conditions, they would have been asked to rejoin the rest of the class. All five forms, plus whatever the student was working on, were kept in a folder the student could refer to at any time.

During the first week that my study was implemented, I also collected surveys from eligible students and their parents. This was to determine their views of previous years' language arts instruction. The questions focused on students' previous experiences with reading, their motivation level toward reading, and their interest in differentiated instruction.

During weeks two through five of my study, students were very busy. They read *Old Yeller* on their own, learned any vocabulary not yet mastered by completing

various activities, and worked on their Reading Activities Menu. Students were also expected to journal at least once a week about their experiences with the project.

During the third week, I interviewed each student. This gave me a chance to ask them how the project was going and if they had any concerns or questions for me.

During the last week of my study, students watched the movie *Old Yeller* with the rest of the class and wrote a comparison/contrast paper. Students were interviewed one last time, and I administered parent and student surveys again.

The grading for this unit was drastically different from anything I had ever tried. Because students had to have scored at or above the 80th percentile to be eligible for the Contract for Reading Skills and Vocabulary, they had already demonstrated that they had mastered the skills. Students received an A in my grade book for all vocabulary and skill work. For any concepts check-marked on their contract (meaning they had to join the rest of the group for instruction), students completed the assigned worksheets and received the grade from the worksheet. All extension activities were not graded; if they had been, students might have resisted more challenging work for fear of jeopardizing their grade.

Limitations of the Study

The subjects I used played a large role in the limitations to my study. First, one main focus of my study was the motivation levels of gifted and talented students. Some students naturally have a high level of intrinsic motivation, which made it hard to show an increase by using differentiated instruction. Second, the sample size I used for my study was a significant limitation. I was only left with five subjects for my study because students had to score 80% or higher on the pretest. I also had to

contend with a selection bias due to choosing subjects only from my morning class to include in my research. I chose this class because I had them 30 minutes longer each day, which gave them time to complete all surveys, interviews, and journals. This limited the amount of data I was able to collect and made it difficult to generalize my results.

There are two other limitations to my study. One was my methods of instrumentation. Teacher-made instruments are always somewhat unreliable and biased. History could also have played a part in limiting my study, however I don't believe this was a major limitation because my study was only six weeks long.

There were a few things I did to minimize these limitations. I encouraged school attendance. I kept accurate records of my findings. I attempted to make my instruments valid and reliable. Last, I maintained the integrity of all my data.

Timeline of the Study

Week 1

1. Students were given a pretest of the vocabulary and skills tested in the *Old Yeller* unit
2. Eligible students were introduced to the project and all materials were handed out and explained
3. Eligible students completed a survey
4. Parents of eligible students completed a survey

Week 2

1. Students began reading *Old Yeller* on their own
2. Students began learning any vocabulary words not yet mastered

3. Students began work on their Reading Activities Menu
4. Students journaled about their experiences with the project

Week 3

1. Students continued to read *Old Yeller* on their own
2. Students continued to learn any vocabulary not yet mastered
3. Students continued to work on their Reading Activities Menu
4. Students were interviewed about their feelings towards the project
5. Students journaled about their experiences with the project

Week 4

1. Students continued to read *Old Yeller* on their own
2. Students continued to learn any vocabulary not yet mastered
3. Students continued to work on their Reading Activities Menu
4. Students journaled about their experiences with the project

Week 5

1. Students finished reading *Old Yeller*
2. Students demonstrated their mastery of their vocabulary words
3. Students continued to work on their Reading Activities Menu
4. Students journaled about their experiences with the project

Week 6

1. Students watched the movie of *Old Yeller* with the rest of the class
2. Students wrote a comparison/contrast paper with the rest of the class
3. Students were interviewed about their feelings towards the project
4. Students journaled about their experiences with the project

5. Students completed a survey
6. Parents completed a survey

Findings

What type of impact would curriculum differentiation have on my gifted and talented students? Would the use of curriculum differentiation improve my gifted and talented students' level of motivation? These were the two questions guiding my action research project. Through the use of data sources such as a pretest, surveys, journaling, interviews, and observation, I tried to find out the answers to those questions.

Pretesting was used for this study because it confirmed the need for differentiated instruction in my classroom. I used student and parent surveys to compare attitudes from previous years' reading instruction to the instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit. The surveys were given to the students and parents during the first and last weeks of my study. Journaling done by the students and myself was used because it helped me identify patterns that occurred throughout the course of the study. I also conducted interviews during the third and sixth week of my study. The purpose of the interviews was to get more focused answers than may have been possible through student journaling. My last means of instrumentation was observation. Observation was used because it gave me first-hand knowledge of how the project was going on a daily basis.

The first week of my study, I gave my students the option to take a pretest of the vocabulary and skill work for the upcoming unit, *Old Yeller*. To be included in my study, students were required to score at or above the 80th percentile on the pretest. Of the 19 students in my class, 17 took the pretest. The remaining two students were

excluded because they went to the resource room for reading and had a separate curriculum graded by the resource teacher.

The pretest was given over a two-day period. The first day, a pretest over skill work for the unit was given. Fifteen out of the seventeen students scored at or above the 80th percentile on this section of the pretest. On the second day, students took a pretest of the 50 vocabulary words used in the unit. Every student scored below the 80th percentile on this section of the test. When the skill and vocabulary scores were combined, however, five students scored at or above the 80th percentile.

I administered student and parent surveys the first and last week of my study. Each survey included questions with Likert-type responses using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating. The first question asked students to rate the importance of curriculum differentiation (see Figure 1). On the week 1 survey, four out of five students rated its importance at a 5. Student C rated its importance at a four. When given the same question on the week 6 survey, four students (Student C included) marked the importance of curriculum differentiation at a 5, while Student A's rating fell to a 4.

Parents were asked this same question (see Figure 2). On the week 1 survey, three parents rated the importance of curriculum differentiation at a 5. Parents B and E marked its importance at a 4. During the week 6 survey, Parents B and E again rated the importance of curriculum differentiation at a 4. Parents C and D's responses also stayed the same, at a 5. Parent A was the only parent whose rating fell; they marked the importance of curriculum differentiation at a 4.

Figure 1. Student Responses to the Importance of Curriculum Differentiation

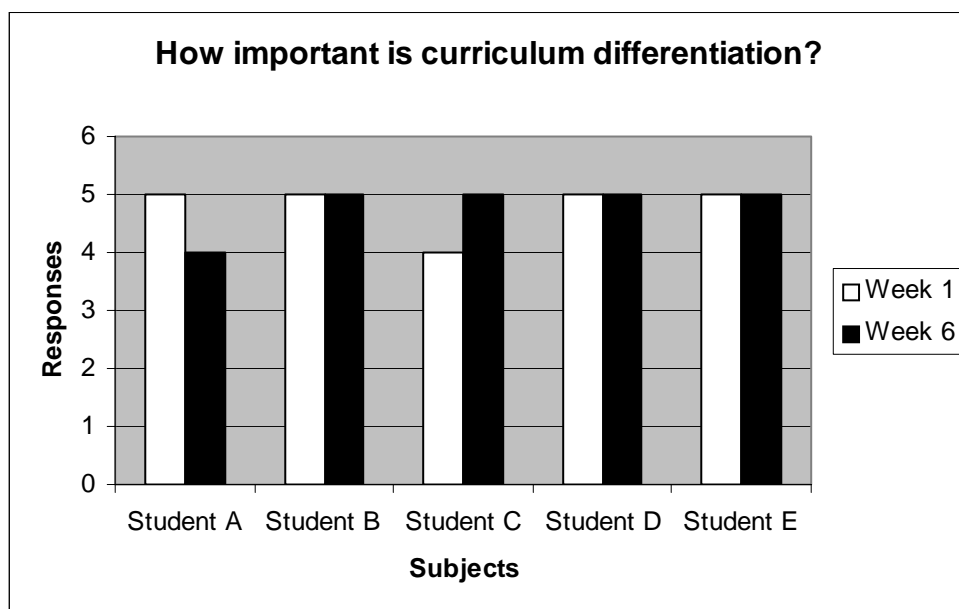
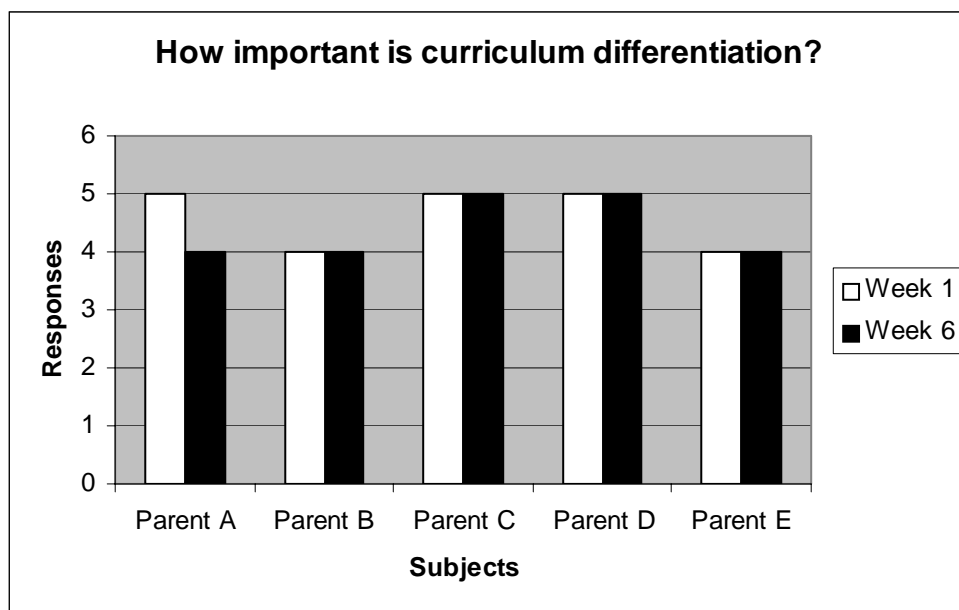


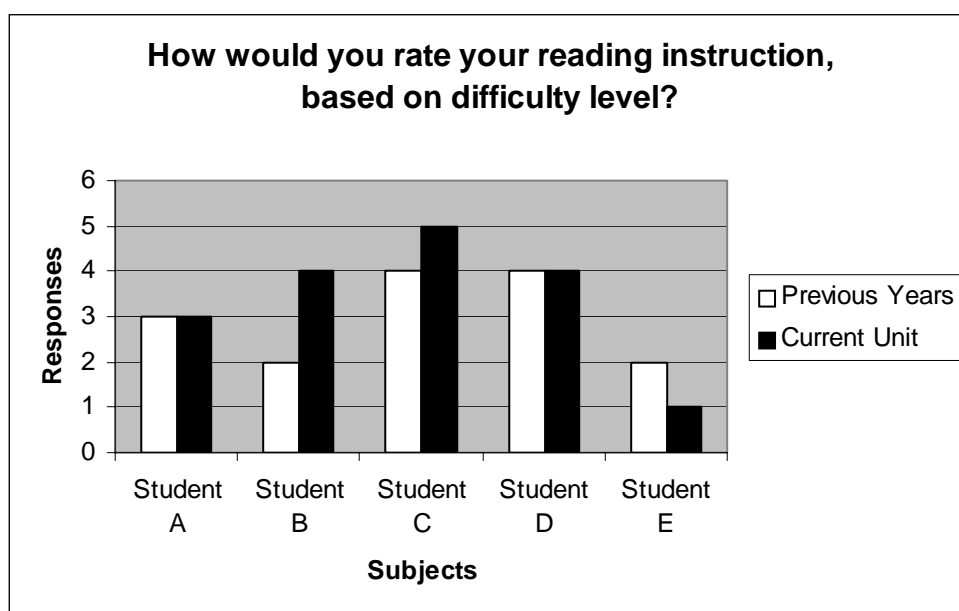
Figure 2. Parent Responses to the Importance of Curriculum Differentiation



To find out if curriculum differentiation was having an impact on my students, I had them compare previous years' reading instruction to instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit, based on its level of difficulty (see Figure 3). Student A rated both previous and current instruction at a 3, meaning both were of average difficulty.

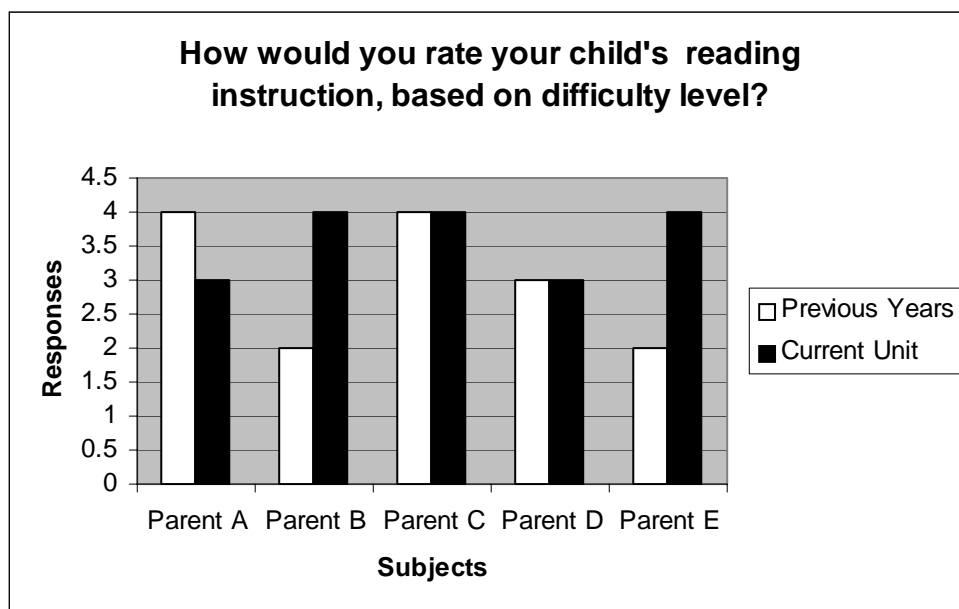
Student D rated both previous and current instruction at a 4. Students B and C both felt the instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit to be more challenging. Student B rated previous instruction at a 2, and current instruction at a 4, while Student C rated previous instruction at a 4 and instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit at a 5. Only Student E's rating dropped from a 2 for previous instruction to a 1 for instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit.

Figure 3. Student Responses When Asked to Compare Previous and Current Reading Instruction, Based on Difficulty Level



On the same question, parents were asked to compare their child's previous reading instruction with that of the *Old Yeller* unit (see Figure 4). During the week 1 survey, Parents A and C rated the difficulty of previous reading instruction at a 4. Parent A's rating went down to a 3 on the week 6 survey, while Parent C's rating stayed the same. Parents B and E rated previous reading instruction at a 2, and instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit at a 4. Parent D rated both previous and current reading instruction at a 3.

Figure 4. Parent Responses When Asked to Compare Previous and Current Reading Instruction, Based on Difficulty Level



The last question on both the student and parent surveys focused on effects curriculum differentiation had on students' motivation to learn reading. Figure 5 shows that when students were asked this question, Students A, C, and E all felt differentiated curriculum would motivate them to learn reading, shown by a rating of 5 for each student. Students B and D both rated this question at a 4.

Parents were asked this same question (see Figure 6). During the week 1 survey, Parents A, C, D, and E all rated this question at a 5, a rating that meant parents felt curriculum differentiation would definitely increase their son or daughter's motivation to learn reading. Parent B rated this question at a 4. During the week 6 survey, Parent B again marked a four, along with Parents C and D. Parent A rated this question at a 2, down from their original rating of a 5. Parent E rated a 3 for this question, also down from their original rating of 5.

Figure 5. Student Responses When Asked if Modified Curriculum Would Increase Motivation to Learn Reading

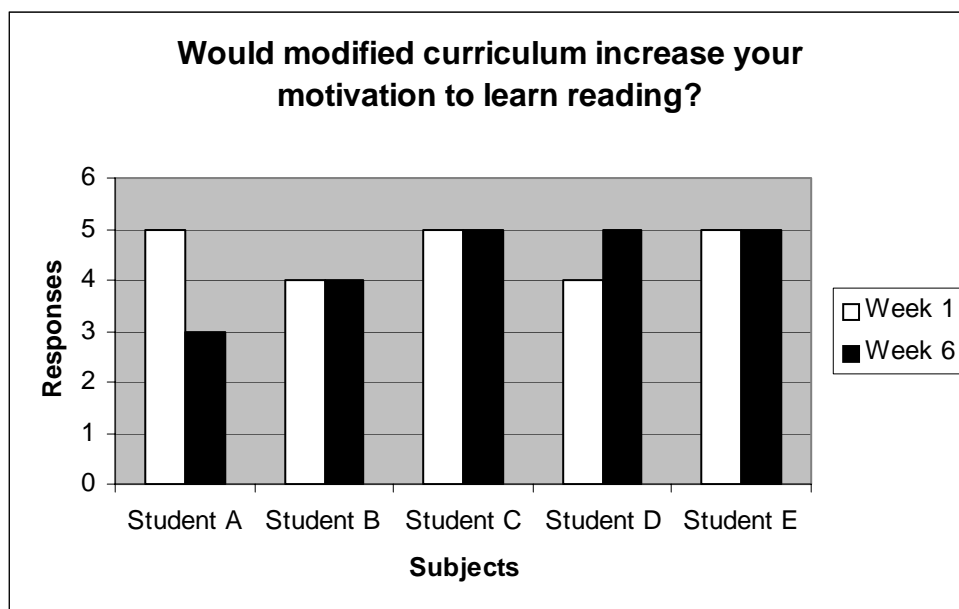
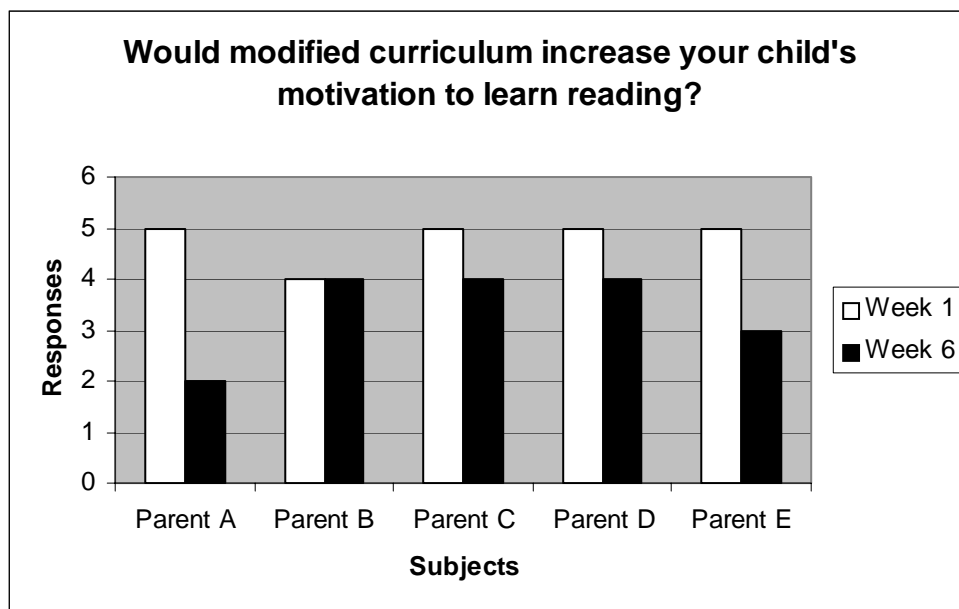


Figure 6. Parent Responses When Asked if Modified Curriculum Would Increase Motivation to Learn Reading



During the course of my study, I kept a personal journal. At the beginning of the study, I had planned on journaling twice a week. After the first few weeks,

however, I began journaling only once a week due to time constraints. When I went back and read the journal entries, the most common theme was that I was always anxious that things weren't going well. Frequent complaints were: was the project working, had I given up too much control, was I overworking the students, was the project challenging enough, should there have been more guidelines and deadlines, and was I going to finish on time? Journal entries following these worries always included statements such as "I should have known it would work out," "Things worked out better than I expected," "Like usual...I worry too much," or "...this is my first time! It doesn't have to be...perfect."

Even more useful than my journal entries were those of my students. Students were expected to journal once a week. Questions focused on finding out the level of impact that differentiated curriculum had on my students. They were given a list of topics I had prepared, including questions or concerns they had about the program, things they liked/disliked, and their feelings about their reading curriculum when using differentiated instruction. Through their entries, I was able to calm most of my worries. More importantly, I was able to observe the impact curriculum differentiation had on my students.

In general, students were very positive in each journal entry. They often commented how much they liked being able to read *Old Yeller* at their own pace and do projects instead of the "easy" classroom worksheets. They also wrote a lot about the puppet show and play they were going to perform at the end of the project. If students did complain in their journal entries, it was usually about not knowing what to write.

By the fifth week, students' journal entries started to look quite repetitive. Another problem was many of the journal entries I received did not truly relate to my research questions. Because of this, I asked the students to compare previous years' reading instruction to what they were receiving for the *Old Yeller* unit. Student A responded, "Whenever I pick up a book I make sure it is challenging. All of the classes I've been in [have had] a good reading level [that have] been at my level." Student C answered, "I used to wish the teachers and class sped it up and [I] started to not like reading and started to think reading was boring." Student D stated "reading used to be easy and boring because we had to listen to the same thing over and over." Students B and E had similar responses. Student B stated, "Reading used to be easy. In fifth grade, reading is easy." Student E answered by saying, "in other years [reading] was easy and now it is really easy."

For the final journal entry, I typed up a list of questions (see Appendix L) for the students so I could get even more in-depth answers relating to my research questions. The first question asked the students if they found the *Old Yeller* unit more challenging. Students C and D answered yes, Student B stated it was a little more challenging, and Students A and E answered that it was not more challenging. I also asked students to consider ways I could make the unit more challenging. Answers included using a more challenging book, requiring more activities to be completed, and using more difficult vocabulary worksheets. I was also curious to know if the students would be in favor of deadlines for units such as this. Everyone but Student C responded yes. The fourth question asked students if they would have liked more direct instruction from me during the unit. Student A was the only student who

indicated the need for more direct instruction. The remaining four students answered that they liked having to ask each other first.

I also interviewed students to get a better idea of how curriculum differentiation was impacting them. The interviews were conducted during week 3 and week 6 of my study. The first question asked students if they thought the work for the *Old Yeller* unit was at their level. During week 3, the responses were mixed. Student A felt the work was more challenging. Student B felt the work to not be challenging enough. Students C, D, and E all felt the work was a little more challenging. When interviewed during week 6, all students felt the work was more difficult. I also asked students if they felt they had the same amount of class and homework as with other units. Most students felt they had the same amount of work. Only Student C complained during week 3 about having too much homework during of the *Old Yeller* unit. I also asked students if they liked working independently. All students responded positively during both interviews.

To determine if curriculum differentiation made a difference in my students' motivation level, I also asked them if the work they were doing for the *Old Yeller* unit affected the way they felt about reading. During the week 3 interviews, responses included "reading is a little more interesting [because] you get to do things on your own," "reading used to be boring, [but now I] like reading more," and "I like reading ahead and doing the vocabulary worksheets." During the week 6 interviews, the responses were less positive. Only Student C said it had changed the way he felt about reading. Students B and D said it changed a little, while Students A and E said the *Old Yeller* unit did not change the way they felt about reading.

Probably the most effective method of collecting data that I used was teacher observation. Through observation, I was able to see first-hand the impact curriculum differentiation had on my talented and gifted students. The students appeared to enjoy working on their own. They always took the initiative to get their assignments done. They almost always asked other group members before they came to ask me. Other than providing them with limited assistance, they put on an entire play and puppet show for the rest of my students. They worked diligently and appeared to stay on task at most times.

The students appeared to be very motivated during most of the study. Four of the students finished reading *Old Yeller* in about two weeks. Student C, who was absent or tardy throughout much of the study, didn't finish the book until the fourth week. The students were also very motivated when it came to completing their vocabulary words. Everyone but Student C had his or her vocabulary activities completed early on in the study. The only times I saw students less motivated was when they were required to be with the rest of the class for instruction.

There were a few uncontrolled factors that affected this study. First, I was absent three times during the course of the study. This affected the results of my journaling and observation. Student C's lack of attendance was another uncontrolled factor. Student C was tardy 14 times and absent five times during the study. Answers to surveys, interview questions, and journals could also be considered an uncontrolled factor to this study. Even though they were told to be honest, students may have answered with what they thought I wanted to hear.

There were also several weaknesses to my study. The pretest I gave was flawed. The first part was too easy, and the second part was too difficult. My survey and interview questions were also flawed because some of the questions did not even relate back to my research questions. Another weakness was that my observations were quite limited because the students worked in the hall each day during reading. The only time I physically spent with them was when I left the rest of my students to sit in the hall for a while.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, I wanted to find out how differentiated instruction would impact my students, and second, I wanted to find out if the use of differentiated instruction would motivate my students in the area of reading. The data suggested that differentiated instruction did have an impact on my students, however it did little to improve their motivation in the area of reading.

Renzulli and Reis (1998) verified that curriculum differentiation has an impact on students when they stated that allowing students to learn more about what they are interested in gives them not only a feeling of choice and control, but also one of enjoyment. I saw evidence of this by allowing students to read at their own pace and by not making students engage in direct instruction with me.

When beginning my study, I wasn't sure I wanted my gifted and talented students reading *Old Yeller* by themselves. I received resounding positive feedback from the students, however, and now I feel this to be one of the best decisions I made during the *Old Yeller* unit. Student responses to reading ahead included "I like reading ahead because I get bored by staying on one chapter at a time," "I like working ahead and at my own speed," "The thing I most like is that I got to read whenever I want," and "I always wanted to read ahead." Letting the students read ahead gave them a feeling of choice and control, because they were in charge of how much they read each day.

Throughout my study, I also worried I was not spending enough time with my gifted and talented students. Again, all five students responded positively, saying that this was one of their favorite things. During the week 1 interview, Student A

responded by saying that reading “is more interesting because you get to do things on your own” and Student C responded “I like trying to do it on my own first.” In his journal, Student D stated “...it makes it more challenging to try to work it out on your own.” In the week 6 interview, Student E felt it was more difficult working independently, but that it was okay because the students could ask each other questions. These responses show that the students liked having control over their own learning, and they liked the added challenge it provided.

Allenback (1995) concurred that curriculum differentiation has a positive effect on students because it ensures that gifted and talented students will have a successful experience based on their individual abilities. She also stated that because teachers have eliminated the already learned material, students are able to focus on activities that are more meaningful to them.

I saw evidence of this by allowing students to choose how they were going to demonstrate mastery of their vocabulary words and by allowing them to choose which projects they wanted to complete on their Reading Activities Menu. “I like the different types of [vocabulary] worksheets,” Student C responded in his week 3 interview. In their journals, Students B and D commented that the vocabulary worksheets made the unit more challenging. In the week 6 interview, Students A and B both commented that they liked doing the puppet show and the projects. In both the week 3 and week 6 interviews, Student D commented that he liked doing all kinds of activities. Throughout the study, I worried that I had not set enough guidelines for the students, but their comments show that by allowing them choice and control over the worksheets and projects, the experience was more meaningful to them.

When comparing survey and interview results, it was not as easy to see the type of impact curriculum differentiation had on my students because most of the results contradicted one another. On the surveys, students were asked to compare previous years' reading instruction to the instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit, based on level of difficulty. During the interviews, students were asked if they felt the work they completed during the *Old Yeller* unit was at their level.

During the interviews, Student A said the *Old Yeller* unit was a little more difficult. This contradicts her survey ratings that showed that she felt both previous and current instruction to be of average difficulty, rating both at a 3. The results for Student D were similar. In his interview, Student D said the work completed during the *Old Yeller* unit was at his level, however his ratings on the surveys also stayed the same, at a 4. Student B said the *Old Yeller* unit was "sort of" at his level. On his survey, however, he rated previous reading instruction at a 2 and current reading instruction at a 4. Student E made the most shocking response during her week 6 interview. She stated that the work she completed during the *Old Yeller* unit was at her level. On her survey, however, she rated previous years' reading instruction at a 2 and current reading instruction at a 1. Student C was the only student with congruent results. He felt the work he completed during the *Old Yeller* unit was at his level. His survey results showed the same: he rated previous years' reading instruction at a 4 and rated instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit at a 5.

I am not discouraged by these findings. I already knew by week 3 of my study that the *Old Yeller* unit was not as challenging as I had hoped. Most of the students agreed that both the vocabulary worksheets and the fact they were reading the book at

their own pace were the most challenging aspects of the unit. The projects on the Reading Activities Menu were not challenging enough. Because the projects were the bulk of the unit, they overshadowed the other more positive aspects.

I also asked parents to compare their child's previous reading instruction to instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit. Parents B and E both rated previous instruction at a 2 and rated the *Old Yeller* instruction at a 4. Parent C rated previous and current instruction at a 4. Parent D's rating also stayed the same for the week 1 and week 6 survey, at a rating of 3. Only Parent A's rating dropped. Parent A rated previous instruction at a 4 and the instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit at a 3. I feel this rating is low because Parent A commented that her daughter reads books at the same level of difficulty as *Old Yeller's* all the time. I think the reason the other parents' ratings are very different from their children's is because parents are not in the classroom during instruction. Also, not all children share with their parents what goes on at school.

According to Allenback (1995), curriculum differentiation helps support students' intrinsic motivation. It does this by creating novelty, uncertainty, and challenges, by providing instructional support, and by promoting control opportunities. During my study, I tried to show that curriculum differentiation positively affected students' motivation to learn reading. This was difficult to show because the five subjects used in my study already possessed a high level of intrinsic motivation. Because of this, the results for this research question were varied.

When looking at my survey results, I don't see much of an effect on students' motivation to learn reading. On the survey for week 1, I asked students to rate

whether or not they felt modified curriculum would increase their motivation to learn reading. On the week 6 survey, I asked if modified curriculum had enhanced their motivation level. Interestingly, Student E rated both surveys with a 5. She was the same student who, when comparing previous instruction to instruction given during the *Old Yeller* unit, based on level of difficulty, had put a rating of 2 on the week 1 survey and a rating of 1 for the week 6 survey. She was also the student who said that reading had been easy in previous years, and was even easier in fifth grade. Student B rated his motivation level at a 4 for both the week 1 and week 6 surveys. Over the course of the six weeks, Student A's rating fell from a 5 to a 3. She is the student who generally reads books at the same challenge level as *Old Yeller*. Student C rated both weeks with a 5. This is not surprising because he was the most positive the whole way through the unit. Student D's rating went from a 4 during the first week, to a 5 during the sixth week.

The parent surveys showed similar results. Parent A rated her child's level of motivation at a 5 the first week and rated it at a 2 the sixth week. The comment she wrote next to her low rating stated "I think [Student A] would be more motivated to read if it was a book of her choice that [would be] more challenging to her." Parent E rated her daughter's level of motivation at a 5 for the week 1 survey, which fell to a 3 during the week 6 survey. Parent C and D's ratings also fell, from a 5 during the week 1 survey to a 4 during the week 6 survey. Only Parent B's rating stayed the same for both surveys, at a 4.

Reis, Burns, and Renzulli (1992) stated that because gifted students so often have to relearn material they have already mastered, the result is that it can lead to

frustration and boredom. I saw this frustration and boredom in students' journal entries. Student C stated "I used to wish the teachers and class sped it up...[I] started to not like reading and started to think reading was boring." Student D also corroborated this point. "Reading used to be easy and boring because we had to listen to the same thing over and over," he stated. Student A responded, "whenever I pick up a book I make sure it is challenging. All of the classes I've been in [have had] a good reading level [that have] been at my level." Students B and E had similar responses, showing their continued boredom in reading. Student B stated, "reading used to be easy. In fifth grade, reading is easy." Student E answered by saying, "in other years [reading] was easy and now it is really easy."

I saw these same feelings when conducting the interviews. I asked students if the *Old Yeller* had unit changed the way they felt about reading. Students had mixed responses. Student C responded by saying that he started to like reading more in fifth grade because he had been bored in previous grades. Student D stated that reading was a lot more fun, and again commented about being able to read ahead in the book. Student E, again contradicting earlier survey results and comments made in her journal, said, "Reading used to be boring. It's not boring anymore." Student B felt there was somewhat of a change in his attitude toward reading. Only Student A felt there was no change.

There were a few times during my study where the students had to rejoin the rest of the class for instruction. Even though the students never verbally complained, and always completed the work, I was able to observe their frustration at having to waste precious moments they could have spent on their modified curriculum.

Renzulli and Reis (1998) observed that when some previously bright but underachieving students realized they could both economize on regularly assigned material and “earn time” to pursue self-selected interests, their motivation to complete regular assignments increased. I found this to be true when Student A commented in an interview about how she liked working independently: “I got more work done in the [same] amount of time.”

Even though I didn’t have as much evidence as I would have liked to show that curriculum differentiation enhanced my students’ motivation to learn reading, I will continue to modify my curriculum as often as possible. This is because both students and parents overwhelmingly showed their support of it on the survey question that asked them to rate the importance of curriculum differentiation. The majority of students rated its importance at a 5. Two parents rated its importance at a 5 and three rated its importance at a 4. Only Student A and her parent’s rating fell from a rating of 5 during the week 1 survey to a 4 during the week 6 survey. I feel this was attributed to Student A’s comment that she reads books like *Old Yeller* all the time. Her parent stated “I think she would be more motivated to read if it was a book of her choice that [would be] more challenging to her.”

There are alternative explanations for these findings, all of them dealing with the fact that most of my data instruments were flawed. The first instrument that was flawed was my pretest. The first half of my pretest was too easy and the second half was too difficult, making it luck that the five students who qualified for my study happened to be the five most gifted and talented. Even though my pretest was flawed, it was not a total loss. Because 15 out of the 17 students who took the pretest passed

it, I now know that the worksheets I was using for my *Old Yeller* unit are not challenging enough for the students.

Another instrument that was flawed were my surveys. Some of the questions did not relate to my research questions. The fact that the surveys were only given over a six-week period could have affected the outcomes; students may have remembered their answers from the first survey. I also believe some students rushed to finish the surveys because the results were very inconsistent with my other data sources. Last, it is possible that even though students were told to answer honestly they may have answered the questions the way they thought I would want them to.

I can even spot flaws in my interview questions and methods. As with the surveys, some of the questions I asked in the interviews weren't directly tied to my research questions. I should have had much more focused questions. Second, both sets of interviews were conducted in the classroom. Even though other students were working on assignments, just having other students around could have caused anxiety for the students I was interviewing. Last, I began administering the second set of interviews during a busy time in class and finished them during recess. At both times, the students were rushed and did not appear to put much thought into their answers.

There were also several limitations to my action research project. The first limitation dealt with the characteristics of my subjects. As mentioned, my study tried to show that gifted and talented students' motivation levels would increase with differentiated instruction, but the five subjects I used had a high level of motivation to begin with. Another limitation to my study was my sample size. Five students were not enough to conduct a study such as this. I was not able to collect enough data,

making it difficult to generalize my results. The fact I missed three days also limited this action research project because it affected my journaling and observation. Student C's absence was also a factor, as he was tardy 14 times and absent 5 times during the course of the study. As mentioned, my instrumentation was also a major limitation to this study. My instruments were flawed and the data was collected over too short a time period. Even the location for my study could be considered a limitation. Each day, my gifted and talented students worked in the hall so as not to bother the rest of the class. Students may have been on task less than I thought they were.

The needs of gifted and talented students should be addressed just as often as the needs of below-average students. At the beginning of the study, I felt strongly about this, and I still do. I felt strongly that by differentiating my everyday curriculum, my gifted and talented students would be more motivated to learn reading. Even though my findings were inconclusive in this area, numerous studies have shown that curriculum differentiation must take place in order for gifted and talented students to feel successful in the classroom.

Additional research in this area needs to be done. My recommendation to other educators would be to continue to learn more about curriculum differentiation and its benefits to gifted and talented students. More specific suggestions include studying a larger sample of gifted and talented students, studying them over a longer period of time, and utilizing a wider variety of data sources. Educators should also research other methods of curriculum differentiation.

Based on my experiences with this project, I plan to continue to enrich my reading instruction with differentiated curriculum whenever possible. I will continue

to learn all that I can about how to best meet the needs of all students in my classroom, and no longer neglect the needs of those students who may need it the most—the gifted and talented students. I will continue to learn all that I can about how to best meet the challenge of delivering effective reading instruction to my gifted and talented students.

Action Plan

The purpose of my study was to find out if the use of differentiated instruction would enhance the learning achievement of gifted and talented students in my classroom. The data did not suggest that curriculum differentiation impacted my students' level of motivation to learn reading, however I still believe all the research stating that it can. Because of this, I am no less committed to differentiating curriculum in all the subjects I teach.

At this time, I plan to continue differentiating spelling the way I always have. These methods include allowing gifted students to learn challenge words, work ahead in the spelling book, use spelling books from higher grades, and use the alternate spelling book I created that has students learn definitions to words and idioms.

I also plan to continue using pretests and contracts when I can. In the future, however, I will make sure the pretests are written more effectively. With the contracts, I would like to try setting deadlines for the students to help keep them on track. I would also like to set more guidelines in terms of how many projects they should accomplish and for how the projects should look when they are finished.

Aside from altering the pretests and contracts, I would like to try different methods of differentiation in the areas of reading and English. I would like to do a

better job at providing gifted and talented students adequate challenge for their superior learning abilities. To accomplish this, I will continue to use Winebrenner's (2001) book, which has many strategies for challenging gifted and talented students.

One of these strategies is called the Study Guide Method (Winebrenner, 2001). This strategy is for units where a pretest cannot be used because the material to be covered is new to all students. To use the Study Guide Method, teachers list the ten most important concepts they want mastered by the end of the unit. Next, the teacher creates a study guide that includes these key concepts. Gifted students will use the study guide to learn the concept at their own pace while the teacher is teaching the unit directly to the rest of the class. To make sure students are actually learning the material on the study guide, the teacher will have checkpoints by which the student must demonstrate mastery. After the student has completed the study guide, they will engage in an extension project to become a resident expert on a topic related to what the whole class is learning.

To make my reading curriculum more challenging, I have several additional ideas. Gifted and talented students could work on more challenging novels separately or as a group. They could read more than one novel by the same author we are covering in class. Students could read the whole book instead of just a section, as is done in our basal series. When the rest of the class is reading one novel for literature circles, they could read more than one. These are not new ideas for teachers, they are just ones I have not tried.

The last thing I plan to do is share my research with other teachers. As a teacher, I know how difficult it is to keep up with lesson planning for the average and

below-average students. I want to show teachers that with little or no effort, lessons can be planned to accommodate their above-grade level students, too.

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Appendix A

Week 1 Student Survey

Week 1 Student Survey

Circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

1. How would you rate your reading instruction so far in elementary school?
(not challenging) 1 2 3 4 5 (challenging)

2. How do you feel about your reading instruction so far in elementary school?
(boring) 1 2 3 4 5 (loved it)

3. Is it important for you to have reading instruction that fits your level?
(not important) 1 2 3 4 5 (very important)

4. Would reading instruction that fits your level increase your motivation to learn reading?
(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (definitely)

5. If being in a reading class that used instruction modified to your level meant more homework, would you still be in favor of it?
(no way!) 1 2 3 4 5 (yes, definitely!)

Appendix B
Week 1 Parent Survey

September 27, 2004

Dear Parents,

I am currently pursuing my master's degree. My final course requires an action research project related to my field. I have chosen to explore the area of differentiated instruction with gifted and talented students.

Your son or daughter was chosen for this project based on their score from a pretest that covered the vocabulary and skills work for the upcoming unit. They have proven their need for a more challenging type of instruction.

Your child will be reading the novel, *Old Yeller*, just like rest of the students. Unlike the rest of the class, they will be reading the book at an accelerated pace. They will also be completing challenging projects instead of the vocabulary and skills work they have already mastered.

I am asking for your help in completing the attached survey. Your son or daughter will be completing a similar survey. Your answers are confidential. They are only used as data for my action research project. In approximately six weeks, I will be sending home another survey for you to fill out. It will be important for the **same** parent or guardian to complete both surveys. The answers from both surveys will help me decide how best to differentiate instruction for the remainder of the year.

I have also attached consent and assent forms. Please read and sign the consent form. The assent form is for your child to read and sign. Unless these forms are signed and returned, I cannot use your child in my study.

I appreciate your support and time. I would be glad to share the results of this project when I am finished. Please feel free to contact me at school (455-2659) if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Erin Chalupa

Week 1 Parent Survey

Circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

1. How would you rate your child's previous reading instruction in elementary school?

(not challenging) 1 2 3 4 5 (challenging)

2. Do you think your child's previous reading instruction in elementary school affected their motivation to learn?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very much)

How so?

3. Do you feel it is important for your child to have reading instruction that is modified to their level?

(not important) 1 2 3 4 5 (very important)

4. Do you think reading instruction modified to their level would positively enhance their motivation to learn?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (definitely)

5. If being in a reading class that used instruction modified to your son or daughter's level meant more homework, would you still be in favor of it?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (yes, definitely)

Appendix C

Week 6 Student Survey

Week 6 Student Survey

Circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

1. How would you rate your reading instruction for the *Old Yeller* unit?
(not challenging) 1 2 3 4 5 (challenging)

2. How did you feel about the level of the reading instruction for the *Old Yeller* unit?
(boring) 1 2 3 4 5 (loved it)

3. Was it important for you to have reading instruction that fit your level?
(not important) 1 2 3 4 5 (very important)

4. Did reading instruction that fit your level increase your motivation to learn reading?
(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (definitely)

5. Even though you had work that was more challenging, and had to do more of it at home, would you be in favor of more programs like this in the future?
(no way!) 1 2 3 4 5 (yes, definitely!)

Appendix D
Week 6 Parent Survey

November, 2004

Dear Parents,

As you may recall, I surveyed you in October to determine your attitudes regarding your child's previous reading instruction at Lisbon. I am now in the final week of my study, and am asking for your help again in completing the attached survey. Your child filled out a similar survey. Remember, your answers are confidential and will only be used as data for my action research project. To ensure that my data is reliable, it is very important that the **same** parent or guardian completes this survey. As mentioned in the previous letter, the answers will help me decide how best to differentiate instruction for the remainder of the year.

Thank you once again for your support and time. If you are still interested in the results of this project, or if you have any questions, please feel free to call me at school (455-2659). If possible, please return the attached as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Erin Chalupa

Week 6 Parent Survey

Circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

1. How would you rate your son or daughter's reading instruction for the *Old Yeller* unit?

(not challenging) 1 2 3 4 5 (challenging)

2. Did you feel it was important for your child to have reading instruction that was modified to their level?

(not important) 1 2 3 4 5 (very important)

3. Do you think the instruction your son or daughter received during the *Old Yeller* unit positively enhanced their motivation to learn reading?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (definitely)

How so?

4. Even though your son or daughter had work that was more challenging, and had to do more of it at home, are you still in favor of more programs like this in the future?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (definitely)

Appendix E

Week 3 Interview Questions

Week 3 Interview Questions

1. The work you are doing for the *Old Yeller* unit is very different from what the rest of the class is doing. Do you feel the work you are doing is at your level? (if not, why?)
2. How do you feel about the amount of work you are doing for the *Old Yeller* unit? Is it too little, the same amount, or too much?
3. Has the work you are doing for the *Old Yeller* unit affected the amount of homework you have had each night? How so? How does that make you feel?
4. Has the work you are doing for the *Old Yeller* unit affected the way you feel about reading? How so?
5. What is it like for you to be working independently?
6. In general, what do you like and dislike about the work you are doing for the *Old Yeller* unit?
7. What are some things I should change if I am going to teach other units this way?

Appendix F

Week 6 Interview Questions

Week 6 Interview Questions

1. The work you did for the *Old Yeller* unit was very different from what the rest of the class did. Do you feel the work you did was at your level? (if not, why?)
2. How did you feel about the amount of work you did for the *Old Yeller* unit? Was it too little, the same amount, or too much?
3. Did the work you completed for the *Old Yeller* unit affect the amount of homework you had each night? How so? How did that make you feel?
4. Did the work you completed for the *Old Yeller* unit affect the way you felt about reading? How so?
5. What was it like for you to work independently?
6. In general, what did you like and dislike about the work you completed for the *Old Yeller* unit?
7. What are some things I should change if I am going to teach other units this way?

Appendix G

Contract for Reading Skills and Vocabulary

★ **CONTRACT FOR READING SKILLS** ★
AND VOCABULARY

Student's Name: _____

✓ **Concept**

✓ **Concept**

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

.....

Vocabulary Words for Unit

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

.....

Vocabulary Activities

Student's Signature: _____

Teacher's Signature: _____

Appendix H

Contract for Permission to Read Ahead

★ **CONTRACT FOR PERMISSION
TO READ AHEAD** ★

Check each statement to show that you agree with it. Then sign the contract.

- I will not tell anyone anything about the story until everyone in the group has finished reading it.
- I will not participate in prediction activities.

Student's Signature: _____

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★ **CONTRACT FOR PERMISSION
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Appendix I
Reading Activities Menu



READING ACTIVITIES MENU



Student's Name: _____

Directions:

During the next _____ days, create your own menu of activities from the list below to do in place of the regular assignments.

Date(s) Activity

- _____ Create and perform a puppet show of the story or book.
- _____ Interview another person who read the book.
- _____ Write a letter to the author.
- _____ Write another chapter.
- _____ Write a different ending.
- _____ Using a thesaurus, find synonyms for your 6 favorite words.
- _____ Create a dialogue between 2 characters.
- _____ Read other books by the same author. Compare/contrast.
- _____ Read another book of the same type. Compare/contrast.
- _____ Write a story or book of the same type which contains similar elements.

Include 3 free days. Add on days to the activities listed or create your own activities:

Appendix J
Daily Log of Extension Work

Appendix K

Working Conditions for Alternate Activities



WORKING CONDITIONS FOR ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES



If you are working on alternate activities while others in the class are busy with teacher-directed activities, you are expected to follow these guidelines.

1. Stay on task at all times with the alternate activities you have chosen.
2. Don't talk to the teacher while he or she is teaching.
3. When you need help and the teacher is busy, ask someone else who is also working on the alternate activities.
4. If no one else can help you, keep trying the activity yourself until the teacher is available. Or move on to another activity until the teacher is free.
5. Use soft voices when talking to each other about the alternate activities.
6. Never brag about your opportunities to work on the alternate activities.
7. If you must go in and out of the room, do so as quietly as you can.
8. When you go to another location to work, stay on task there, and follow the directions of the adult in charge.
9. Don't bother anyone else.
10. Don't call attention to yourself.

I agree to these conditions. I understand that if I don't follow them, I may lose the opportunity to continue working on the alternate activities and may have to rejoin the class for teacher-directed instruction.

Teacher's Signature: _____

Student's Signature: _____

Appendix L

Week 6 Student Journal Questions

Week 6 Student Journal Questions

1. The goal of this unit was to make reading more challenging. Do you think the *Old Yeller* unit was more challenging for you? Why or why not?

2. What could be done to make this unit more challenging?

3. Would you be in favor of having deadlines for this unit, to help keep you on track? Why or why not?

4. I tried to back away and not do much for this unit because I wanted to see how it went. Do you feel I should be more involved? Why or why not?

5. I felt like there weren't enough guidelines for how you were supposed to do your projects. What is your opinion about that? Explain your answer.

6. I was also nervous about letting you work in groups because I was worried you wouldn't get as much accomplished. Do you think group work should be allowed? Why or why not?

Appendix M

Institutional Review Board Application Materials

Assent Document

Project Title: The Effects of Differentiated Instruction on Gifted and Talented Students

Investigator: Erin Chalupa

I am doing a research study. A research study is a special way to find out about something. I am trying to find out if I change instruction to fit your level, it will make you more motivated to learn reading.

If you decide that you want to be in this study, I will ask you to do several things. First, you will be reading the novel, *Old Yeller*, faster than the other students. Second, instead of doing the daily worksheets and vocabulary, you will be doing projects that fit your level. You will also be keeping a journal. Last, I will be giving you a survey to fill out and I will interview you. That way, I can see how things are going.

I am hoping you will benefit from this study. I do not see any risks should you decide to be in my study.

When I am done with the study, I will write a report about what I have found out. I won't use your name in the report.

You don't have to be in this study. It's up to you. If you say okay now, but you want to stop later, that's okay, too. All you have to do is tell me.

If you want to be in this study, please print, then sign your name below.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.
(Print your name here)

(Sign your name here) Date _____

Informed Consent Document

Project Title: The Effects of Differentiated Instruction on Gifted and Talented Students

Investigator: Erin Chalupa

If you are the parent/guardian of a child under 18 years old who is being invited to be in this study, the word “you” in this document refers to your child. You will be asked to read and sign this document to give permission for your child to participate.

What is the purpose of the study?

This is a research study. I am inviting you to participate in this research study because you are gifted in the subject of reading.

The purpose of this study is to find out the effects of differentiated instruction on gifted and talented students. I hypothesize that assignments fitting the instructional level of a gifted and talented student will increase their motivation for learning. I feel this is an important study because the needs of gifted and talented students are often neglected in schools.

How long will I be in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for approximately six weeks.

What will happen during this study?

There are several things that are going to occur during this study. First, you will be taking a pretest to show what you already know about the unit to be studied. Second, you will be reading a novel at an accelerated pace. Third, you will be doing assignments that are tailored to your academic level. You will also be keeping a personal journal of your experiences during this study. Last, you will be completing surveys and interviews (on all surveys and interviews, you are free to skip any questions you would prefer not to answer). The study will take place at Lisbon Elementary School, during school hours.

What are the risks of this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating.

What are the benefits of this study?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because I will continue planning lessons that fit the needs of gifted and talented students.

What about confidentiality?

I will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. All survey and interview results will be coded by number. In the report I will write about this study, I will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

Is being in this study voluntary?

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

I encourage you to ask questions. My number at school is 455-2659. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact my professor, Linda Armstrong, lindaa@graceland.edu, 641-784-5260. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Subject's Name (printed): _____

(Signature of Subject)

(Date)

Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative's Name and Relationship to Subject:

(Name – printed)

(Relationship to Subject - printed)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative)

(Date)