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Differentiated Instruction for All Students in English Language Arts

Abstract

Teachers are challenged to meet the needs of every student in their classroom and deliver instruction that gives students the opportunity to learn at their highest potential. In any given classroom, there are “at risk students,” “grade level students,” and “accelerated students” that need to have their specific learning needs met. Specifically in English Language Arts, teachers have a wide spectrum of abilities they need to accommodate for. All three levels of learners should be pushed to their fullest potential and challenged equally. By administering a survey to several schools in a suburban Rochester, New York community – data was collected to see if teachers believe all students in their classrooms are being sufficiently challenged, and if so, how are the teachers accommodating for all levels of learners in ELA. Data collection occurred over several weeks in the spring. The information gathered can help all levels of students be adequately challenged, and also provide resources and techniques to further the professional development of current and future teachers.

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Differentiated Instruction for All Students in English Language Arts

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Special Education

Supervised by

Dr. Susan M. Schultz

School of Education
St. John Fisher College

April 16th, 2017

Abstract

Teachers are challenged to meet the needs of every student in their classroom and deliver instruction that gives students the opportunity to learn at their highest potential. In any given classroom, there are “at risk students,” “grade level students,” and “accelerated students” that need to have their specific learning needs met. Specifically in English Language Arts, teachers have a wide spectrum of abilities they need to accommodate for. All three levels of learners should be pushed to their fullest potential and challenged equally. By administering a survey to several schools in a suburban Rochester, New York community – data was collected to see if teachers believe all students in their classrooms are being sufficiently challenged, and if so, how are the teachers accommodating for all levels of learners in ELA. Data collection occurred over several weeks in the spring. The information gathered can help all levels of students be adequately challenged, and also provide resources and techniques to further the professional development of current and future teachers.

Dedication

“Who dares to teach, must never cease to learn.” – John Cotton Dana

Without research, and understanding how to grow—we fall behind. We must always push ourselves to our full potential. We must always challenge ourselves. Thank you Mom and Dad for pushing me to my full potential. Thank you Dr. Susan Schultz for pushing me to my full potential. Thank you Webster Central School District for pushing me to my full potential. May we continue to always push our students and children to their full potential.

Table of Contents

Introduction:.....	p. 5
Literature Review:.....	p. 6
- Definition of Differentiation	
- Benefits of Differentiation in English Language Arts	
I. Self-Monitoring	
II. Benefits of Challenging Texts	
III. Vocabulary	
IV. Content Driven Writing	
- Services and Resources	
I. Response to Intervention (RTI)	
II. Enrichment Specialists	
III. Vertical Enrichment	
IV. Technology	
- Inclusion	
- Advocacy	
- Meeting the Needs of All Students	
Researcher’s Stance:.....	p. 20
Methodology:.....	p. 21
- Context	
- Participants	
- Method	
- Procedures	
- Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants	
- Data Collection	
- Data Analysis	
Findings:.....	p. 28
Discussion:.....	p. 36
Conclusion:.....	p. 38
Appendix:.....	p. 39
- Appendix A (Invitation letter to participants)	
- Appendix B (St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board Approval)	
- Appendix C (Consent survey)	
- Appendix D (Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts survey)	
- Appendix E (Differentiated Instruction in English Language Q1 Data)	
References:.....	p. 46

Differentiated Instruction for All Students in English Language Arts

For students to develop academically, they require a level of rigor, challenge, and a set of high expectations that consistently pushes learning forward. English language arts (ELA) is a specific field that demands students to be challenged in order to grow their reading, writing, speaking and thinking. In every classroom, there is a range of students that have a range of needs to help them grow in ELA. There are “at risk students,” “grade level students,” and “accelerated students.” Each type of student could be at a different academic level and require drastically different content to maximize the amount of learning that is taking place for that student.

An elementary classroom full of students that have a large range of abilities in ELA is a common situation across the United States. Day after day, classrooms are filled with students eager to learn and challenge themselves—however not all students are faced with the same level of being challenged. Meeting the needs of all levels of students creates a daunting and difficult task for teachers. Take for example a fifth grade classroom of twenty students. Ten of those twenty students require the general education lessons. They are challenged adequately with the content and rigor that the teacher prepares for each lesson. Six of those twenty students may fall under the category of, “at risk students.” These students may struggle with the content mightily. Perhaps these students do not have the basic skills mastered in order to handle this “grade level material.” The teacher is faced with the task of differentiating the lesson and instruction to meet the lower needs of those six students. These six students will receive attention so that they do not continue to fall behind and struggle as the lessons progress. On the other side of the spectrum are the “accelerated students.” In our scenario, there are four accelerated students that must also have their needs met and be pushed even further so that they are adequately challenged. This group of students may have mastered all of the previous skills and require a lesson that pushes

them the extra mile—to maximize their efforts and challenge them as much as all other students are being challenged. Again, the teacher is responsible for differentiating the same lesson to push the accelerated students to their full potential. Unlike the at risk students, the accelerated students are not in jeopardy of falling behind if their lessons are not adequately differentiated. The accelerated students, however, are at risk of mediocrity if their lessons are not adequately differentiated and the students are not challenged sufficiently.

In my research study, I wanted to examine teachers across a school district and see how/if they feel if all students in their classroom are being pushed to their full potential. I wanted to dig deeper into the resources that teachers are using specifically to meet the needs of their accelerated students in ELA. To conduct this research, I developed an anonymous survey with a range of questions that delved into how teachers accommodate their ELA lessons to every child's needs. The survey was given to two separate schools within the same school district to see if there were any trends or correlations between schools and their differentiation for accelerated students. The schools in my study are part of a suburban upstate New York community.

Literature Review

Creating classrooms where all students are challenged and engaged can often be a challenge for teachers. Students come into a classroom with different skills, prior knowledge, and experiences that shape how well they learn the material. Some students may enter a class with a high level of background knowledge and strength with the material, whereas others, may not have the same familiarity with the topic. English Language Arts, in particular, has a wide spectrum of learners. There will be students who are comfortable behind the pages of a book, and others that still need require the skills to easily flow from page to page. Let's take for

example Student 1. Student 1 who has a developed vocabulary and can read 5th grade level texts in his 3rd grade classroom. For other students, they may be at a different spot developmentally. In that same class, Student 2 may still struggle segmenting basic words. The challenge then presents itself to the teacher who must accommodate for the different levels of learners that are in the classroom. Accommodations need to be made for Student 2, so that he/she continues to develop but not feel overwhelmed. On the other side, accommodations must also be made for Student 1 so that he/she is still challenged and being pushed academically to reach their full potential.

Definition of Differentiation

The process of creating lessons through which all students can succeed and are challenged is called differentiation. Being able to custom build lessons to fit the range of learners in one classroom is no small feat. Teachers must consider the level of their student's knowledge, the content that is being taught, process in which the material is being taught, how a student's knowledge is being assessed, as well as the environment the students are a part of (Fitzgerald, 2016). By understanding a student and how they best develop, lessons can be crafted to help that student reach their full academic potential.

It is important to recognize the value of differentiation for all students. Differentiating instruction is more than modifying instruction so students who have lower academics can be accommodated for. Differentiation can sometimes be overlooked for its benefits toward the gifted students. According to Archambault (1993), "Research has shown that the large majority of gifted students across this nation spend all but two to three hours *per week* in regular classrooms. It follows, therefore, that what happens in this setting will have a profound effect on what gifted students learn, how they feel about school, what subjects they take, and the career

paths they follow. Since these students are among the ‘best and brightest’ this country has to offer, what happens to them in regular classrooms will also directly affect the future of our nation” (p. 103). If students are not being challenged, they are not learning as much as they possible can. Developmentally appropriate instruction is material that is challenging, yet achievable. Former Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, described learning as finding the area in which a child is challenged enough to grow, yet not too much that is causes frustration. Vygotsky’s learning model is known as the zone of proximal development. The model is three circles, the largest circle has the middle sized circle in it, and the small circle is within the middle circle. The smallest circle represents content that a student can do independently, however, not much growth is taking place. On the outer circle, is what a learner currently cannot do. By giving students material that is exceedingly too challenging, not much growth will take place. Between those two extremes is the zone of proximal development. This is where a child will be adequately challenged, but it is where most educational gains will be had. When teaching, you want to provide students with lessons that will challenge them but are achievable. So, whether a student struggles with the material or is very comfortable with the material, lessons need to be modified to make sure all students are doing activities that are within their zone of proximal development.

Differentiating instruction for accelerated students, as well as lower students is often seen as unrealistic. In Good’s research (2006), she describes how easy it is for teachers to become overwhelmed with producing extra materials and creating these deeper lessons. Creating all new lesson plans for higher level students may seem time consuming and another area of stress for teachers. Fitzgerald (2016) gives an additional perspective of differentiation. Fitzgerald describes differentiation as creating meaningful learning experiences for all students in the

classroom. It may not require a range of different lessons and new material, rather opportunities for a student to expand on what the class is working on. Good continues to describe differentiation as, “good teaching focused on key concepts and skills based on concepts. All students, regardless of ability or readiness, should be challenged to make sense of these essential understandings” (p. 12). Differentiation does not require reinventing the wheel. It does require knowing the level of the students, and understanding what additional supports can challenge and help further develop those students.

Benefits of Differentiation in English Language Arts

English Language Arts is a foundation for skills learned throughout a student’s academic career. It provides students with reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that are present in all facets of education. To help develop these skills, all students should be challenged. A student may be above grade level, below grade level, or on grade level – they still need to be exposed to higher levels of text and new concepts. Boeve (2009) states, “Students must have opportunities to interact with texts that foster continuous progress in reading. To do this, educators must challenge all students, including those who are academically talented” (p. 204). In classrooms that have a wide range of literacy levels, the accelerated students may often not be challenged. Teachers may steer their attention in differentiating for students with lower literacy skills. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in its report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent*, students with disabilities or who are academically at risk are provided a multitude of interventions and resources to help them progress, while high-achieving students are often neglected because of their early mastery of skills (Geisler, et al., 2009). Because a student is already high achieving, they are not getting as challenged as the other students in the class. Vygotsky theorizes in his zone of proximal development, that students

being challenged is the cause of growth and becoming stronger in an area. Gifted students need to be getting enrichment to further their growth in school. “Too many students in the United States are not proficient in reading for various reasons, and far too few talented readers encounter challenging reading instruction or even opportunities to read independently at levels that will challenge them” (Reis, Gubbins, et al., 2004, p. 33). Differentiating for accelerated students in ELA is a challenge that all educators must accept. For students to grow stronger academically, they need to be given material and opportunities that challenge them. In a study by the Classroom Practices Observational Study, the instructional and curricular practices used with gifted and talented students in 46 heterogeneous third and fourth grade elementary classrooms throughout the United States, found little to no differentiation in the instructional and curricular practices for gifted students in the regular classroom (Bruce-Davis, et al., 2014). To accommodate for gifted and accelerated students in ELA, the teacher must understand differentiation and how to change their classroom structure to fit the needs of these growing minds.

To keep students growing academically, literacy needs to be an area of focus. Not only for students who may struggle, but all students. Someone who does not practice literacy, does not grow in that area. And through differentiated instruction, gifted students may also pursue their higher education of literacy. Within literacy, there are skills such as self-monitoring, comprehending higher level texts, vocabulary, and content driven writing that can be differentiated to help accelerated students reach their full potential.

Self-Monitoring. Self-monitoring is a student’s ability to acknowledge how they are reading. When a student self-monitors his/her reading, they are checking to see if what they are reading makes sense or not. Being able to self-monitor ones reading requires the student to

evaluate and reinforce the different things that they are taking away from the text. For students to be self-monitoring, they need to be aware of what they understand, be able to identify what they do not understand, and be able to use the appropriate strategies to adjust their comprehension (Kartel & Ozkan, 2015). By analyzing their own reading, a student is able to catch and fix any misconceptions they have about the text. This self-regulation is a characteristic of students who are gifted in literacy and require additional strategies and reinforcement to continue what they are doing. Risemberg and Zimmerman (1992) explain that:

Research indicates that gifted students spontaneously utilize self-regulatory learning strategies more frequently in comparison to non-gifted students. When trained to use strategies, gifted students also use them more effectively and can transfer these strategies to novel tasks. Implications are that self-regulation measures may be a useful adjunct in diagnosing giftedness and that self-regulation training may further enhance gifted students' academic achievement (p. 99).

With teacher guidance, these accelerated students should be receiving additional self-regulation strategies to improve how they look at their own reading. Teacher and student should be setting goals, and working with texts that challenge the student. By working with higher level words and concepts, the student will have to watch their reading more closely. A teacher can implement a self-checklist to help these students know what steps to take if they encounter an area or word of difficulty. It is important to be exposing these young minds to higher level texts and words so that they experience a challenge and have to work through difficulties.

Benefits of Challenging Texts. By allowing students to read more challenging texts independently, students are preparing themselves better for the rigor in the secondary level of education. The Common Core State Standards calls for students to read increasingly complex,

higher-level texts to prepare for the challenges outside of school. If gifted students are not continuously being pushed and pursuing higher level texts, they are not doing themselves any justice. These students will not develop these skills as much as students working with challenging material. In research done by Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, and Lindo (2015), “the positive effects of differentiated reading on students’ attitudes toward reading found statistically significant differences in students’ attitudes toward reading favoring SEM-R [accelerated students in this research]” (p. 103). This research shows that when students are given texts that have challenging concepts, it improves their attitude toward doing the reading. Having a positive attitude towards school, and specifically reading, is beneficial for a student.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary is another area of literacy that allows accelerated students to reap the benefits of differentiation. Word recognition and word knowledge is fundamental in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Geisler, et al. (2009) emphasized the teacher’s responsibility to use explicit instruction, using new words, and then differentiate the instruction based on the needs of the learners. “One example of specific vocabulary instruction to expand writing is teaching synonym awareness and practice, such as categorizing words that go together, constructing personal webs for writing, and using a thesaurus,” states Geisler (p. 219). By exposing gifted students to higher level words, they may use them more frequently and become more comfortable with them. The New York State Common Core Modules states:

One of the primary goals of the listening and learning strand is to expose student to rich, content-related vocabulary...focus their mental energy on the words and ideas presented in the text, and can eventually be better prepared to tackle rich, printed content on their own. (Common Core Curriculum)

The New York State Common Core Modules aim to build a “broad, rich vocabulary base.” Terms such as, astronomy, gasping, dredged, abundance, minute-men, Koran, vigor are all highlighted as “essential vocabulary”. Challenging students’ vocabulary is necessary for building strong literacy skills. The New York State Modules are not necessarily used for all classrooms, but high expectations for vocabulary need to be held for all students. Gifted or not, continuous improvement of vocabulary is beneficial for young learners.

Content Driven Writing. Writing is another key component of literacy. According to Vantassel-Baska (2015), writing is an opportunity for students to express and explore different ideas and be able to convey their thoughts on paper. Vantassel-Baska goes on to explain how it is beneficial for accelerated students to further develop their writing by making connections to content they enjoy. She asserts, “Giftedness is developed over time through the interaction of learners’ potential with nurturing environmental conditions” (p. 192). By giving gifted students the ability to write about ideas that interest them, it will improve engagement and further develop the young learner’s cognitive abilities. She states “It is primarily the schools that must provide relevant opportunities to develop learners’ domain-specific potential” (p. 192). Writing is an opportunity for students to express and research ideas that interest them. Schools can nurture this interest by promoting students to explore these concepts at a more enriched level.

Services and Resources

A gifted student has needs equally important as those of a struggling student. To help meet the needs of a gifted student, there are programs and resources available to teachers that will help differentiate for that child. Executive Director of The Center for Gifted Studies, Dr. Julia Link Roberts, emphasizes the importance of making resources available to the gifted student. According to Roberts and Siegle (2012), “State legislators and department of education personnel must

understand that gifted students, like all students, have a right to learn something new every day” (p. 2). Resources for gifted students include:

Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is a program that uses a multi-tier approach to help make sure all students are receiving the level of support they require to grow. RTI has two areas it focuses on. Primarily, RTI is designed to screen and identify students with academic delays. If a student is identified, the student is offered different tiers of support to achieve their academic goals (Carter-Smith, 2015). The second area of focus is as an educational resource for gifted students. The Association for the Gifted recognizes the importance of the RTI method. It specifically addresses “the needs of children who are ‘twice-exceptional’ indicating that these needs must be met through the provision of access to a challenging and accelerated curriculum” (National Association for Gifted Children, p. 1).

Over several years, RTI has received increased educational funding. School districts are being given new software and products to “buy in to Response-to-Intervention.”

According to the Response to Intervention Adoption Survey 2011, which was conducted by GlobalScholar, the American Association of School Administrators, the Council of Administrators of Special Education, and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 94 percent of respondents indicated their districts are currently at some stage of RTI implementation. Moreover, of those schools planning or implementing RTI, elementary schools are leading the way, with 80 percent of respondents reporting they have fully implemented RTI in one or more domain areas (reading, writing, math, behavior, or science). (NewsWire, 2011)

RTI may look different in every school district. Districts can choose different ways to implement the program that will fit the needs of their students. One approach to RTI in an elementary school

is having an RTI time. At that time, students switch classrooms and group with students of similar ability. These students then receive the enrichment or support based on that group's needs. Take for example an RTI program for 1st grade ELA. Some students may be grouped with their peers and be working on letter sounds. Another group may already have mastered that skill and are working on sentence building and creative writing. According to the educational journal, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Johnsen, Parker, and Farah believe the purpose of RTI for accelerated students is the "growth within the core curriculum and beyond the core curriculum" (p.228). The RTI program is designed to give students access to the specific skills they need to develop as learners.

Enrichment Specialists. An enrichment specialist can be a person employed by a school district, as well as, a third party resource that is used to augment lessons that are being learned in the general education classroom. Similarly to a general education teacher, enrichment specialists create lessons with specific goals and areas that will be strengthened from the lesson. In terms of elementary ELA, enrichment specialists may choose to target creative writing, using technology in reading/writing, new reading strategies, etc. One school district in upstate New York describes its purpose for enrichment in their schools: "It is our goal to ensure that every student reaches his/her maximum potential as demonstrated through continuous ambitious growth. Classroom teachers, enrichment specialists, and administrators collaborate to extend and enrich learning" (Webster Central School District). This strategy reaches all students in the classroom and helps to build critical thinking skills.

Vertical Enrichment. Vertical enrichment is a term for activities given to gifted students that can supplement their learning. A common misconception for teachers is that enrichment does not mean more of the same. Enrichment is defined as "making something more meaningful,

substantial, or rewarding” (<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/enrichment>). Increased repetitions is not necessarily enrichment. Several vendors specialize in material designed to challenge students in a range of ELA areas. Prufrock Press, The Critical Thinking Co., and MindWare produce material to develop higher level problem solving skills. In the classroom, teachers are encouraged to use multiple approaches to assess learning and multiple pathways for learning. This means providing information in a range of ways. Using higher level questions, having access to multi-cultural material, problem based learning, and independent projects are strategies teachers can use to achieve vertical enrichment (VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016). By giving these opportunities, it can help accelerated students strengthen their critical thinking skills.

Technology. Incorporating technology is another strategy to help challenge students appropriately. There are resources available for teachers that cultivate higher level thinking and supplement what the students are already doing in the classroom. The online resource “Newsela.com” is a program that adapts reading for the level of the students. An article by PR Newswire helps explain the benefits of Newsela.com: “Newsela helps students climb the staircase of reading complexity from elementary through high school by providing daily news articles written at five levels of difficulty” (<https://newsela.com/pages/release/2013-10-11-newsela-raises-seed-funding/>). There are five versions of the same article that can be created. Students are then given the article that best fits their reading levels. In a classroom of 20 students, there can be five different articles being read, however, at the end of the reading, all students can have an equally engaging discussion. Creator and CEO of Whipsmart (founder of NewsELA), Gross, describes the purpose of why he created such a program, “Every teacher I know struggles with classrooms full of kids at dramatically different reading abilities. We built Newsela for them” (Staff, 2013, p. 1).

Another technology resource that is being used in elementary schools is called Raz-Kids.com. Raz-Kids describes itself as an “online guided reading program with interactive e-books, downloadable books, and reading quizzes” (<https://www.raz-kids.com/>). Accessible from any tablet or computer, Raz-Kids provides easy access to hundreds of books leveled by skill. Students are able to open their device and have a collection of leveled texts at their fingertips. For accelerated students, they have immediate access to texts that are challenging to them. As a student improves his or her reading ability, they can adjust the reading level and have access to brand new books that are more suited to provide them with a challenge.

Inclusion

In 2004, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) established the law that requires children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet their unique needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – disability.gov, 2004). Another term for this concept is inclusion. Inclusion happens when children with and without disabilities work and learn together in the same classroom. Research has shown that inclusion has many benefits for all levels of students in the classroom. A study done by Begen and Turner-Cobb at the University of Bath found benefits for inclusion. The research showed a positive increase in student’s self-esteem when working with an inclusion classroom. The research also found a correlation with mood and student’s heartbeat. The inclusion class experienced a slower heart beat rate during activities and an overall increase in mood. “Increased social self-esteem, in response to inclusion also highlighted the protective role of belonging. Exposure to exclusion resulted in a neutral self-esteem response rather than the anticipated self-esteem decrease” states Begen and Turner-Cobb (2014, p. 578). Cooperating with all students in the class can help build friendships, belonging, and a feeling of unity within the class.

Another study conducted by Blackmore, Ayiward, and Grace, in 2016, surveyed a group of parents with children who are part of an inclusion classroom. The research drew several conclusions about children in an inclusive setting. The parents surveyed “identified improvements in child communication and behavior as the most significant developmental gains” (p. 15-16). Participants also noted improvements in eye contact, participation, positive social interactions, and behavior. Generally, parents had positive views on having their child in an inclusive setting.

For inclusion to be successful, classrooms need students that are below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. Inclusion is built around the idea that all students should be cooperating, sharing experiences, and learning together—regardless of educational level.

Several programs that gifted students may be a part of can hurt the inclusion classroom. Inclusion becomes an issue when students are being removed from the general education classroom to receive gifted services. With such a large amount of school districts using some form of RTI, there are many students that may be part of an accelerated RTI program and that are removed from the general setting to receive their enrichment. When a program takes students out of the classroom to continue their education, it is no longer inclusion. There are different levels of learners that are learning different skills--separately. Separating students leads to missed opportunities for learning within an inclusion classroom.

Advocacy

School provides students with the ability to continuously grow and learn. Regardless of a student’s academic level, each day should meet them with a new challenge and opportunity to continue their education. Gifted students may often get overlooked in the classroom. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted in 2002 set the groundwork of almost a decade of neglect for accelerated students. “Gifted and talented students often sat ignored in their classrooms, waiting

to be taught by teachers who were preoccupied with the mandate to bring low-achieving students to proficiency” assert Duffett, Farkas, and Loveless (2008, p. 14). This focus on the lower level learner resulted in “stagnated growth” for many accelerated students. Advocating for high level learners is something that needs to be done in order for all students to receive a fair education that pushes abilities to their full potential. Dr. Roberts stresses the importance of the role of teachers in giving students the opportunities to flourish. She explains that teachers must be well informed on students with gifted needs and have a clear understanding of “what is possible.” Establishing strong relationships with the student(s), as well as, their family(ies) is important in understanding what goals to set for that child. A teacher should be able to reach out to others for resources and ideas to help target areas of growth for these students. Dr. Roberts expands on her advocacy by saying at a schoolwide level, schools should “understand the importance of providing education services for gifted and talented students” (p. 60). Access to enrichment specialists and critical thinking materials needs to be valued. Every child deserves to maximize their potential. Advocating for students with exceptional needs is imperative.

Meeting the Needs of All Students

Differentiating instruction allows for unique, adapted teaching that aims to challenge the accelerated students. Whether a student is struggling with material, on grade level with material, or accelerated with the material—the goal of teaching is to engage all of the students and academically push their thinking to limits they did not know were there. By modifying instruction for gifted students, the teacher is better able to keep the students engaged and have high academic standards. By not modifying instruction for these higher level students, the teacher is limiting the opportunities for a child to grow and make educational gains. By promoting a gifted learner’s self-monitoring, they are able to learn from their mistakes and

critically look at how they are reading. By giving a gifted student the means to read a higher level text, they are practicing their literacy strategies on a more rigorous scale, as well as, acquiring new vocabulary. New vocabulary improves communication, writing, comprehending more complex text, and overall improving an individual's literacy. Finally, by helping students link their writing to other content areas, these students can develop an enriched understanding of the material.

“The success of high-achieving children, like their typical peers, lies in the hands of the general education classroom teacher,” Geisler et al. (2009) explains, “differentiated instruction, a recent trend in education, is helpful—perhaps critical—for educators who teach students with a range of abilities and needs” (p. 217). All students deserve a challenging, beneficial education, regardless of their current academic levels. Differentiation, especially in ELA, is a way to effectively teach a range of students so that it meets each student's unique needs.

Researcher's Stance

For the sake of anonymity, the school district, schools, and teachers researched will be given pseudonyms. My role in this research was as the interviewer. I designed a series of questions to try and gather information on differentiating instruction for accelerated students. My curiosity began when I noticed the issue of differentiating for accelerated students first hand. I noticed that in teacher preparation and staff meetings, a majority of the attention is directed to students that are at risk, or considered on grade level. Accelerated students would not receive as much attention or differentiation as the other students. I saw this as a disservice because all students need to be challenged equally and pushed to their full potential.

I wanted to research this field of study for two reasons. First I wanted to see if my observations aligned with other teacher's observations. I wanted to see if other teachers were

also noticing a difference in preparation time and differentiation between at risk students and accelerated students. My second reason to conduct this study is because there are exceptional teachers that are doing exceptional things for their accelerated students. I wanted to gather their resources and see different ways accelerated students can have their needs met. This research allowed me to see ways that teachers can meet the needs of all three levels of students equally—and have all students be challenged in ELA.

From my research, I was able to analyze similarities and differences that general education teachers had in terms of equally challenging all students. By using this survey with two different schools in the same school district, I was also able to see patterns across multiple schools. Finally, I was able to gather several strategies that are used in the ABC School District for meeting the needs of accelerated students in ELA.

I am certified in primary education, grades one through six. Currently, I am working towards earning a Master's of Science in Special Education at St. John Fisher College. The anticipated graduation date for my Master's in Special Education is May, 2017. As I complete this Master's program, I am also a staff member of the Webster Central School District, as a third grade teacher.

Methodology

Context

The 'Differentiated Instruction for All Students in English Language Arts' research study was conducted in ABC School District. The ABC schools are part of a suburban demographic in upstate Rochester, New York. My research was specifically conducted in two schools within the ABC School District –Elementary One and Elementary Two.

I chose the ABC School District as the focus of my research for several reasons. Because I have worked in this school district, I wanted to see how other teachers in the school district viewed differentiation in ELA and what resources are being used. I also chose this school district because of the relationships I have developed with colleagues and school personnel. I believed that the ABC School District staff would feel comfortable leaving honest and well detailed responses to help guide the research.

Participants

My research was conducted in the form of an anonymous survey. The survey was made available to all grade level teachers in two elementary schools, referred to in my research as A and B. In total, the survey was made available to 56 teachers. The teachers in the research were exclusively general education classroom teachers. These teachers work with all three levels of learners each day –at risk, grade level, accelerated. These are the teachers that are responsible to differentiate for each skill level. Teachers were asked to participate and were not required to link themselves to the survey in any way.

Method

Creating lesson plans that accommodate to all levels of students is a difficult task. Creating lesson plans that consistently challenge all levels of students is an even more difficult task and something I found myself struggling with as a new teacher. From my years of college practicum, student teaching, and informally observing other teachers perform their craft – I have noticed something that is an injustice. And it is an injustice I find myself contributing to. In a general education classroom, teachers devote a majority of their attention and preparation to ‘at risk’ students. Though it is a necessity to meet the needs of those ‘at risk’ students, students on the other side of the spectrum are not being challenged to their full potential. Accelerated

students are seen as the students that, frankly, “get it.” In terms of ELA, these are the students that are able to complete the readings, diligently complete any writing assignment, and satisfactorily answer a series of questions. The injustice comes when those accelerated students are not being challenged to their full potential with the differentiation that is made for them. At risk students may be doing lower level assignments, but challenged to their maximum abilities. Accelerated students may be completing grade level assignments or above grade level assignments but still are not challenged to their maximum abilities. The purpose for my research was to see if other teachers had similar experiences in their classroom – and what measures they are taking to better challenge the accelerated students to their maximum abilities.

The method to collect my data was through the form of an anonymous survey. This survey was administered to all grade level teachers in both schools, A and B. The teachers were tasked with answering a series of questions that examined how teachers accommodate for all students. The survey also focused on any observations regarding how much focus is put into meeting the needs of at risk students compared to those of accelerated students. The survey was made available for several weeks in March 2017. Teachers were asked to complete it when possible.

Procedures

Conducting a study on an area where you feel there is an injustice or room for improvement expedites the process. While performing the research, I reflected on myself from my experiences in undergraduate research until now. Undergraduate research was confined to a specific topic area and the steps to complete were ridged. My research in Differentiated Instruction for All Students in English Language Arts was different. I passionately feel that there is a large portion of accelerated students in every school district that are not pushed to their full

capabilities. I believe teachers are doing an extraordinary job modifying lesson plans to meet the range of their learners, however, on average, accelerated students are the ones that may not get as much attention as the other students. Because I wanted to delve deeper into this idea – the research came to fruition and I was able to develop my study to the level it is at now.

After identifying the area I wanted to research further, I needed to decide the best way to find out more about differentiating for all students in ELA. To get the most relevant information – I decided that surveying general classroom teachers would be the best option. Doing an online survey was my best option. I wanted teachers to not feel any pressure from helping me with my research. An anonymous survey also allowed teachers to give their honest opinions without having their name tied to any of their answers. My final reason for choosing a survey was because I felt that it would fit better with the schedule of a busy school teacher. Not every teacher will have the time to make a meeting or take the time for a one on one interview. A survey, however, could be completed on the teacher's own schedule. By doing an anonymous survey, I wanted a large sample size of teachers to feel comfortable taking it.

After deciding how to gather information on my topic, my next step was to create the survey questions that would gather information to guide the research. Over several weeks, I carried around a notepad and wrote down any questions that I thought would help me find out more on differentiating for all students in ELA. Over time, I modified the list and made changes to its final form. The questions were broken down into multiple choice questions, as well as, short response questions. I then created the survey using Qualtrics. Qualtrics made it easy to adjust the appearance, feel, and flow of the survey.

Following the creation of my research survey, I needed to create a consent form for the participants to complete. Dr. Susan Schultz, my St. John Fisher College sponsor, and I worked

on a way to have participants give consent in the form of a survey prior to taking the research survey. I created a separate survey, consent survey, which had to have been completed in order for participants to move on to the research survey. By answering ‘yes’ in the consent survey, participants would be linked to the research survey that they could then complete. If participants answered ‘no’ in the consent survey, they would not be given access to the research survey. This would conclude participation in my research.

After both the consent survey and the research survey were developed, I needed to seek approval from the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to conduct the study. The IRB ensures the safety, confidentiality, and ethical rights of participants in a research study. I worked alongside Dr. Schultz and prepared the artifacts that IRB required for research approval. Ultimately the IRB proposal was accepted. My research study was cleared and deemed ethical and appropriate for all participants.

Once the IRB approved my research application, I had to take my proposal to A and B and to gain approval from the school administration. I sat down with the principal at A and B separately and discussed my proposal. I explained the purpose of the research, and process to conduct the research, and that my research had been cleared from the IRB. Both administrators were extremely supportive in helping me conduct this research. Administrators gave me written consent to perform the research in their schools, as well as, an email list of every general education teacher in the school that I would then be able to email the survey to. This was the proverbial “green light” needed to begin administering my research survey and collecting the data on differentiating for all students in ELA.

In order to gain as much participation as possible, I brought up my study at two separate faculty meetings (one at each school). I explained the purpose and process of my study, that it

was cleared by IRB, and when to expect the survey available via email. Staff members seemed very supportive and willing to help when I presented my information to them. In the next week, I would email the teachers and make the survey available to complete.

I know firsthand that teachers often have a lot on their “plate” to complete. Because of this, I decided to keep the survey open for several weeks. Every now and then, I would notice more completed surveys trickling in. By the time I closed the survey, there was a good collection of research gathered. I believe my research could have benefitted from additional responses, however, the data I did collect was a good start for an area of research this large. With additional time and resources, I would have liked to reach out to more schools and more school districts across New York in hopes of collecting more data from different demographics.

After the data was collected from both schools, I was able to analyze and look at the perspectives of different teachers in the ABC School District. I was able to find trends in the data. I was also able to find the resources that teachers are using to help meet their accelerated learners in ELA. The data was reread and analyzed until I was able to draw some conclusions from the data.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Gaining consent from participants in an anonymous survey posed a challenge. After designing the research survey, I created a separate survey I will refer to as the ‘consent survey’. By linking the consent survey to my research survey, I was able to ensure the participants gave consent prior to taking the research survey. In the email inviting participants to take part in my research, embedded was a link to the consent survey. By reading the terms and giving consent, participants were to click “Yes- I agree participate in the anonymous research survey (Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts). By doing so, it would launch the research

survey. From there the participants could answer the series of questions. However, if participants clicked “No - I do not agree to participate in the anonymous research survey (Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts), the survey would be concluded.

All data gathered from the anonymous survey is kept secure and confidential. Data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for three years. Electronic data is password protected. The data will be kept for three years so that I may be able to pursue research further. After the three years, the data will be shredded. The electronic data will be deleted along with my Qualtrics account.

Data Collection

My data was collected from the anonymous survey I created using the online program, Qualtrics. I created the questions in the survey, from my informal observations as a teacher, as well as, research conducted in my literature review. After creating the questions, I used the Qualtrics program to design and host the survey. Qualtrics allowed me to organize the flow of the survey and allow teachers easy access to the survey.

The survey was given out in two parts. In part one, the survey was made available to teachers at A. At a staff meeting, I informed the school of my research and presented the goals I wanted to achieve from my research. I then announced that the survey would be made assessable through the staff email later that day. The survey remained open for several weeks and I accumulated 13 completed surveys from A. In part two, the survey was made available to teachers at B. Also at a staff meeting, I informed the school of my research and presented the goals I wanted to achieve from my research. Similarly to A, I then announced that the survey would be made assessable through the staff email later that day. The survey remained open for several weeks and I accumulated 16 completed surveys from B. In total, I received 29 completed surveys from ABC School District classroom teachers. Please note one participant only

completed question 1 of Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts. The data collected for question 1 has 30 participants.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, I was able to look at how the teachers answered the questions and find trends. The survey can be looked at as having two separate parts. Part one contains the series of multiple choice questions. Part two contains the short response questions that allowed teachers an opportunity to answer in complete thoughts and sentences.

The multiple choice questions targeted topics such as: how much time teachers differentiate for each level of student, whether or not a classroom participates in guided reading groups, the effect of Common Core on meeting the needs of accelerated students, etc. Research participants answered the questions and the data was organized and averaged by the Qualtrics program. Qualtrics laid out the results in numerical graphs, so that I was able to take note of any trends or outliers in the data.

For the short response questions, a majority of my time was spent rereading and highlighting the main points of each response. I found the short response questions to be the most helpful in my research. They allowed me to hear the teacher's voice and see word for word how different teachers felt about meeting the needs of all their students. A majority of the responses had a similar tone. By analyzing the responses, I was able to see what difficulties teachers were experiencing with differentiation in ELA. I was also able to compare and contrast different strategies teachers are using to help reach all levels of learners in their classroom.

Findings

When analyzing the data, the first question I wanted to review was the last question in the survey. Question six of Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts asked, "Do you

believe, on average, accelerated students are being challenged more, less, or equally than at risk students in ELA?” I wanted to ask this question because from my informal observations, accelerated students are not experiencing nearly as much rigor as some of the at risk students. The results from my survey generally agreed with my informal observations. Of the 29 surveyed classroom teachers, 18 believed accelerated students are challenged less than at risk students. Nine teachers believed accelerated students are challenged equally as at risk students. Two teachers believed that accelerated students are, on average, challenged more than at risk students. Though I would have preferred a larger sample size of teachers, 62.07% of surveyed teachers view accelerated students as not being challenged as much as at risk students in ELA. As a teacher, it makes you think about why some students are being pushed more than others to succeed. All students deserve to maximize their potential and be challenged equally.

To delve into this idea further—I began to analyze the written responses to sub question 6a. Participants were asked this sub question if they believed accelerated students are challenged less than at risk students. Sub question 6a asked, “Why do you believe accelerated students are challenged less than at risk students in ELA?” Responses to this question all had a similar tone. Teacher One from B wrote, “Students who are accelerated can always survive with the average students. They don’t grow but they do get the A’s. The at risk students have a greater spot light on them as they are behind in their learning.” Other teachers sang a similar tune by saying accelerated students have “lower expectations because they are not in jeopardy of falling behind.” If we look at education in this light—the purpose of going to school is to get an “A” and move on to the next level of education. My view of education is that students not only leave with a satisfactory grade—but also a rich understanding of material, some of which a student will never be tested on. My fear is that we, as teachers, may becoming complacent with where

accelerated students are. We see that they understand the material and will do well on a state test or any other assessment. These students also become complacent with their academic progress. They excel at doing general education material and may not understand how to respond when the rigor is heightened and the student is actually challenged.

The problem with achieving this maximum potential concept was made clear in teacher responses to the same sub question 6a. “I think we put so much time and effort into getting our at risk students services, that accelerated students are left behind. We don’t have service providers for these kids.” Teacher Two from A continues by adding on, “There is more pressure to get those at risk kids on grade level that we spend more time with them each day.” Time is an extremely precious commodity. For a teacher, there is only so much time in a day. This time needs to be divided appropriately so all students maximize their efforts in school. Often time, at risk students receive time over accelerated students. Teacher Three from A wrote, “not enough time/flexibility in the schedule for their needs (accelerated students) and also needs of kids who are struggling always come first.” At risk students are often more demanding of a teacher’s time. They may require high levels of differentiation and catering to their unique needs so they do not become even further behind. The priority of a teacher will always shift that way so that at risk students are able to make growth.

As a teacher, I know accelerated students often get the preverbal “short end of the stick.” Teachers, however, do not have much of a choice. Their attention must be directed to those who are in jeopardy of not reaching the minimal expectations. Teachers can differentiate to the best of their abilities but sometimes accelerated student just do not get pushed to their full potential. One of my many goals in the education field is to find a way to fix that.

In order to understand how we can push all students to their full potential—we need to understand what is being done in education today to help do this. My survey, *Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts* asked the question, “What are some ways you differentiate for accelerated students in English Language Arts?” The purpose of this question was to see what strategies are currently being used by classroom teacher in the ABC School District. Teacher four at B explained that they, “Use leveled guided reading groups and also expose accelerated students to more complex texts, rich vocabulary, and do additional journal responses.” The idea behind leveled guided reading groups is for students to be placed in a group of students with similar skill levels. A lower level reading group might work on basic skills and understanding of a text. Whereas an accelerated group will get exposed to skills and text that is of higher difficulty and the higher rigor that we aim to achieve. Many teachers from both schools, A and B, responded that they incorporate technology, give students higher level thinking questions/texts, and allow for more independent exploring of texts. The differentiation being done in the ABC School District allows all students to receive unique lessons/objectives based on their skill levels. By using leveled reading groups—more students receive customized lessons that will target the areas they need to be pushed further in.

Guided reading groups are a great way to give students a customized literacy experience. Question four of *Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts* was set up to find out what percentage of teachers are currently doing this strategy. From my data, I found that guided reading groups was a big piece of how the ABC School District is meeting the needs of all students. Of the 29 surveyed teachers, 28 of them said they currently are using leveled guided reading groups. 96.55% of the participants have used this strategy to differentiate and meet the needs of all students in ELA. I also currently am using guided reading groups in my classroom. I

find it organic to group students based on ability and work with each group on their specific needs. It is quick to set up and I have found that students excel in this small group setting. Differentiated reading groups allow me to target a specific skill for each group and give each student material that pushes them to their zone of proximal development.

From my informal observations, I have found that guided reading groups also have a negative component to them. The problem I see is that students often look at the guided reading groups and perceive that they are divided by skill level. Students may then lose confidence, self-esteem, and view their friends differently based on what group they are in. I wanted to see how teachers in the ABC School District felt about this informal observation. Sub question 4a asked teacher, “Do you feel students have a perception of other students academically depending on their leveled reading group?” Of the 28 teachers that answered this sub question, 15 participants said “yes” they do feel students have a perception of other students academically depending on their leveled reading group. Eight teachers said “maybe.” And five teachers believe “no” students do not have a perception of other students based on their reading groups. It was interesting to see the range of data from this question. If I were to extend my research further, it would have been nice to know what grade level each teacher taught and how they answered the question. I believe that as a student gets older in age/grade that they may begin to develop more of a perception of others based on the guided reading groups. On the other hand, students in younger grades may not fully notice how the groups are divided. Regardless—it is something to keep in consideration when using this method to differentiate for all students in ELA.

Along with time, there are additional challenges that teachers must overcome when differentiating for all students. Meeting the needs of all students is by no means an easy task. Research question 5 asked “What are some challenges you may face when differentiating for all

students in ELA?” The most common response from teachers was time. Previously mentioned, time is a rare commodity. There is only 24 hours in a day and splitting that up amongst students can be difficult. In the survey *Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts*, teachers talked about how they divided their preparation time for students. On average, at risk students received more preparation time than accelerated students. Grade level students received, on average, the most preparation time. Please reference Appendix E for additional information. Along with time constraints, teachers also discussed other issues that make differentiation a challenge. Teacher Five from A noted the difficulty with, “keeping ALL students actively engaged during center time, so that each student’s guided reading group can progress uninterrupted can be a challenge.” When a teacher performs small group instruction, there is a portion of the class that needs to work independently. Keeping them engaged and on task can be a daunting task. Another teacher, Teacher Six from A explained, that there is not always enough resources available for the different levels of students. “I also feel like there are not clear cut resources to help push accelerated students more. I would like more attention to be brought to these students in meetings.” Finding resources for different leveled students may sometimes be difficult. It may take time that teachers cannot always afford. For part of my research, I talked with a Kindergarten teacher at B. She will be referred to as Teacher Seven from B. Teacher Seven currently has a student that is performing 6th grade level math and 4th grade level reading – in Kindergarten. During our discussion, she discussed that she gives that student materials and instruction to succeed. She explained that it is not always easy to prepare the materials, however, the student needs to be taught to his capabilities. This teacher incorporates a lot of technology uses and websites such as newsela to have that student reading accelerated texts but still being able to discuss and work with students at his grade level. Another issue mentioned in question 6

states, “Classroom teachers are not trained specifically in enrichment and will attempt to do so as much as possible.” The current education system is set up where at risk students have a majority of the focus. From my recent collegiate level education studies, new teachers are taught how to differentiate, however, nothing specifically for accelerated students. I have taken a plethora of classes covering “how to help struggling readers,” “teaching reading to learners with special needs,” “assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation for students with special needs.” These courses all covered the at risk students and how to meet their needs. I have never been in a class designed strictly for meeting the needs of accelerated students. Six years of higher education, a barrage of credit hours, and not one class designed to specifically highlighting the needs of an accelerated student.

After analyzing question five of Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts, time and resources stand out to me as the main issues teachers are currently having with differentiation in ELA. As we move ahead in education, we need to address these challenges so that students and teachers can get the support and materials they need to bolster student growth.

When differentiation is not enough, at risk students receive additional support from specialized teachers. These special education teachers are trained to create opportunities that will supplement an at risk student’s education. If a student struggles to support his/her information with evidence—the special education teacher will do what they can to help that student improve and reach that goal. When working with the special education teacher—that child now reaches his/her zone of proximal development. Now take for an example a student that understands how to support their information with direct evidence. They can satisfactorily do the task but are not being pushed in the general education setting. They are not reaching their zone of proximal development. This student does not receive opportunities to supplement his/her education

because they are satisfactorily meeting the minimal requirements. Teacher Eight in the ABC School District commented that,

There are no teachers currently in our building to specifically address the accelerated students' needs. We have had enrichment teachers over the years but they are the first to be cut from the budget. Classroom teachers are not trained specifically in enrichment and will attempt to do so as much as possible.

The ABC School District currently has four elementary education enrichment specialists. The goal of these enrichment specialists as explained on their ABC webpages states, "It is our goal to ensure that every student reaches his/her maximum potential as demonstrated through continuous ambitious growth. Classroom teachers, enrichment specialists, and administrators collaborate to extend and enrich learning." I have had the pleasure of welcoming the team of enrichment specialists into my classroom. The specialists prepare whole/small group lessons for six days. Each lesson lasts approximately an hour. The lessons all were based off of the New York State Common Core learning standards and required the students to use higher level critical thinking skills. The lessons were differentiated appropriately so that all levels of learners could research, and present their information to their full potential.

The enrichment specialists teach their series of lessons and then move to another grade level (K-5) in one of the ABC School District's seven elementary schools. The ABC School District has special education teachers in every school to meet the needs of at risk students. Shouldn't there be special education teachers in every school to meet the needs of accelerated students? In my eyes, accelerated students are just as much a part of special education as at risk students. By not providing accelerated students with the resources to push themselves to their full potential—we are selling these students short. Each child deserves an education that pushes

them to their zone of proximal development. An enrichment specialist, unique to each school, could be a way to consistently help general education teachers push their accelerated students to their full potential daily.

Discussion

After completing my research and examining how other teachers accommodate the special needs of all their students, I found it important to take a step back and reflect on my own teaching. Students are all different. Students will always be at different academic levels than each other. In ELA, math, and socially—each child is unique and requires an education to meet those unique needs.

One could analyze teacher responses to Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts, or talk to a teacher for ten minutes and understand that there is never enough time in a day to get everything we want accomplished. Time and resources are a rare commodity in education. It is how teachers chooses to use them that makes for success.

Differentiation is the key to success. Being able to shape a lesson to help general education students, at risk students, and accelerated students is the challenge. My higher education has stressed the value of differentiation from day one. It is my job to modify lessons and materials to help ALL student. Teachers in the ABC School District are some of the best I have had the pleasure of working with. These teachers understand how to give each child specifically what they need to succeed. A goal of my research was to think about the future of education. Is our current system working? Does each child get pushed to their full potential? Is there more we can do to help make this happen? My research has shown me that our current system works, however, there is room for improvement. Not every child gets pushed to their full potential. There are students not being challenged enough in school and that is a disservice.

There is no fault to be placed, however. Teachers work with the time and resources they have. And that time and resources need to be provided to at risk students so that they do not fall further behind. Our education system puts emphasis on at risk students for a reason. Without putting more time and resources into at risk students, those students may just be left behind.

Teachers are correctly using their time and resources on students that are at risk. However, there are still accelerated students that should not be ignored and have their needs met. The question then becomes – what do we do for accelerated students when differentiation is simply not enough? I believe we are on the right path with enrichment specialists. A team of highly trained professionals that provide highly differentiated lessons to help all students work at their highest. A set of four enrichment specialists for seven elementary schools does not seem sufficient to me. I see an education system with a highly trained professional that will serve as the “consultant teacher of accelerated students.” This professional would push in/pull out students throughout the week and supplement their learning with additional material and resources. Take for example a student in grade 3. She excels in reading and currently works with the general education teacher in the highest reading group. This student could work with this consultant teacher to expand on that learning. In a small group setting, the consultant teacher could push in and enrich that student by comparing character traits to that of another story. The consultant teacher could serve as a guide to help work on new writing techniques and critical thinking strategies that the child may not have learned in a general education class alone. Each school would be home to one consultant teacher of accelerated students. This teacher would work hand in hand with general education teachers to develop appropriate lessons and areas to enrich the students.

A criticism for this idea would be funding. An ABC School District teacher explained that, “we have had enrichment teachers over the years but they are the first to be cut from the budget.” Our educational system puts a ceiling on students’ potential. 62.07% of teachers surveyed believe that accelerated students are challenged less than at risk students. By not providing adequate resources, these students will do well in school but never reach that full potential. If my child was accelerated, I would feel cheated if there was not a system in place to continue to push him/her to their full potential. School is all about learning. Funding should not be an excuse for limiting a child’s potential.

Conclusion

It took me 24 years to start to realize that learning isn’t about getting a good grade. It’s not about doing well on a test, or just making Mom and Dad proud. Learning is about understanding the information around you and being able to use it to make a difference. At risk students, general education students, and accelerated students are all students. They all deserve the best teaching, the best resources, and the best education. Differentiation is essential to help all students reach their zone of proximal development. When differentiation is not enough—resources and accommodations should be made to help that child grasp a new idea and reach that new level of understanding. With good opportunities and good teaching, every student can succeed and reach their full potential.

Appendix A

Dear ABC Central School District Staff,

My name is Philip Zola. I am currently completing my final semester at St. John Fisher College where I will be graduating with my Masters in Special Education.

My final semester includes a research portion on a prevalent area of education. The area I chose to focus on is the strategies and level of differentiation that students are receiving for English Language Arts (ELA).

To help further my research, I wanted to survey some members of the ABC Central School District to see how different schools in the district approached differentiation for all students in ELA. My research proposal has been submitted and approved by the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board.

To gather the data, I have created a brief six question anonymous survey. The information gathered from this survey will strictly be used to guide my research.

If you are able to complete this survey and assist me in my research, it would be greatly appreciated. Below is a link to the consent survey. By selecting yes, it will bring you to the research survey where you may answer the research questions.

[Link to consent survey](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself at Philip.Zola@WebsterCSD.org. Or contact my St. John Fisher supervising faculty member, Dr. Susan Schultz, at sschultz@sjfc.edu.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Philip Zola

Appendix B



March 28, 2017

File No: 3686-021617-13

Philip Zola
St. John Fisher College

Dear Mr. Zola:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "Differentiating Instruction for Accelerated Students in ELA."

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at irb@sifc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen Lynd-Balta

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

ELB: jdr



Appendix C

Consent Survey

Q1

I give my consent to participate in Philip Zola's study, a St. John Fisher College School of Education Master's student, Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts. The purpose of the study is compare how different teachers in the ABC Central School District address differentiating for the needs of all students. Additionally, the survey will look at the resources and methods that current teachers are using to best meet the needs of all students in their classroom. The study is an online survey that should take approximately ten minutes to complete. The information from this survey will not be used in any from including aggregate for school evaluation purposes. Dissemination will be done in aggregate form only for publication purposes, with no additional reports going to the district.

If you need further information, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Susan M. Schultz at 585-385-7296. This study has been approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB). There are no risks or benefits for completing the study.

Your rights:

As a research participant, you have the right to:

- Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
- Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
- Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
- Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
- Be informed of the results of the study.

All responses are anonymous. If you agree to participate in this optional survey, please click yes to proceed with the survey.

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If I give my consent to participate in Philip Zola's study, a St. John Fisher College School of Education Master's student, Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts. The purpose of the study is compare how different teachers in the ABC Central School District address differentiating for the needs of all students. Additionally, the survey will look at the resources and methods that current teachers are using to best meet the needs of all students in their classroom. The study is an online survey that should take approximately ten minutes to complete. The information from this survey will not be used in any from including aggregate for school evaluation purposes. Dissemination will be done in aggregate form only for publication purposes, with no additional reports going to the district.

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- Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
- Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
- Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
- Be informed of the results of the study.

All responses are anonymous. If you agree to participate in this optional survey, please click yes to proceed with the survey. Yes is Selected

Q2 Please click the following link to proceed to the research survey:

Differentiated Instruction in ELA Survey

<"https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8HfMkHPEVtbXAPz">

Appendix D

Differentiated Instruction in English Language Arts

Q1 On average, how much preparation time do you require to adequately support at risk students, grade level students, and accelerated students in ELA, per day?

	_____ hours per day					
	Less than 0.5	0.5	1	1.5	2	More than 2
At risk students	<input type="radio"/>					
Grade level students	<input type="radio"/>					
Accelerated students	<input type="radio"/>					

Q2 What are some ways you differentiate for accelerated students in English Language Arts?

Q3 Does the New York State Common Core do an adequate job reaching all academic levels of students?

- Adequate
- Neither adequate nor inadequate
- Inadequate

Display This Question:

If Does the New York State Common Core do an adequate job reaching all academic levels of students? Inadequate Is Selected

Q3a Please explain why you believe Common Core does an inadequate job of reaching all academic levels of students.

Q4 Does your classroom participate in leveled guided reading groups?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Does your classroom participate in leveled guided reading groups? Yes Is Selected

Q4a Do you feel students have a perception of other students academically depending on their leveled reading group?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Q5 What are some challenges you may face when differentiating for all students in ELA? Please be specific.

Q6 Do you believe, on average, accelerated students are being challenged more, less, or equally than at risk students in ELA?

- Challenged more
- Challenged equally
- Challenged less

Display This Question:

If Do you believe, on average, accelerated students are being challenged more, less, or equally than... Challenged less Is Selected

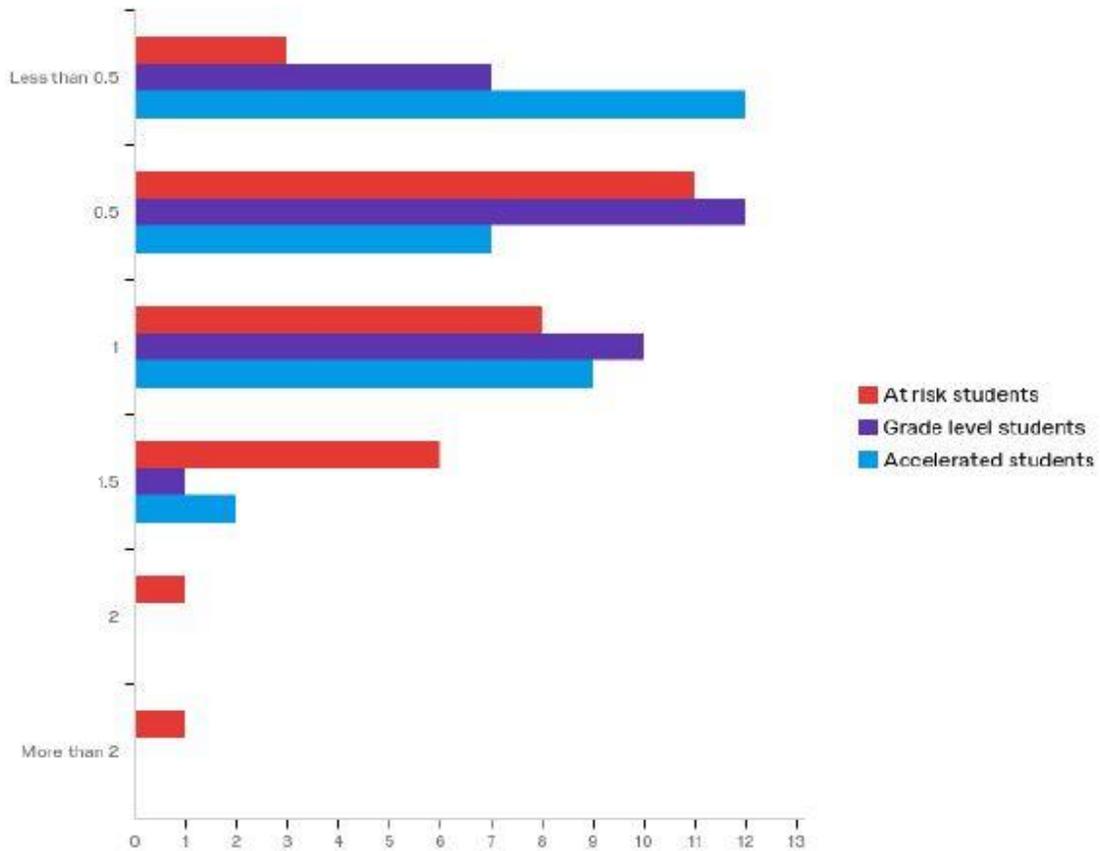
Q6a Why do you believe accelerated students are challenged less than at risk students in ELA?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

Appendix E

Q1. On average, how much preparation time do you require to adequately support at risk students, grade level students, and accelerated students in ELA, per day?

Q1#1 - ___ hours per day



#	Question	Less than 0.5	0.5	1	1.5	2	More than 2	Total
1	At risk students	10.00% 3	36.67% 11	26.67% 8	20.00% 6	3.33% 1	3.33% 1	30
2	Grade level students	23.33% 7	40.00% 12	33.33% 10	3.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30
3	Accelerated students	40.00% 12	23.33% 7	30.00% 9	6.67% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30

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