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Reading Instruction for Talented Readers: Case Studies Documenting Few Opportunities for Continuous Progress

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Storrs, Connecticut

ABSTRACT

In this research study, the type and nature of reading instruction provided for talented readers was investigated through use of in-depth qualitative comparative case studies. A team of researchers conducted multiple observations in 12 different third and seventh grade reading classrooms in both urban and suburban school districts over a 9-month period. These observations focused on whether a differentiated reading curriculum and/or instructional strategies were provided for talented readers. For the purposes of this study, talented readers were defined as reading at least two grades above their chronological grade placement. The areas studied included daily reading practices in these classrooms; modification or differentiation during regular classroom instructional periods; grouping or acceleration opportunities; and independent reading completed by talented readers. Results indicated that little purposeful or meaningful differentiated reading instruction was provided for talented readers in any of the 12 classrooms. Above-grade level books were seldom available for these students in their classrooms, and they were not often encouraged to select more challenging books from the school library. Talented readers seldom encountered challenging reading material during regular classroom instruction.

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University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this research study, the type and nature of reading instruction provided for talented readers was investigated through use of in-depth, qualitative comparative case studies documenting regular reading instructional practices. Of particular interest was whether these practices were modified or enriched for talented readers, defined in this research as students who read at least two grade levels above their chronological grade placement. This study also examined whether talented readers were grouped for instruction, whether different curricular materials or instructional strategies were used with this group, and whether appropriately challenging reading books were available for talented readers either in their classroom or in the school library.

Research documents the wide range of skills and degrees of readiness with which children enter kindergarten (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Research consistently indicates that reading is the most important factor in school success and that a major key to school success continues to be reading achievement (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). No recent study has examined the nature of regular reading instruction for talented reading students, yet related research found that many talented students receive little differentiation of curriculum and instruction, and spend a great deal of time in school doing work they have already mastered (Archambault et al., 1993; Reis et al., 1993; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993).

Review of Related Research

Little research has focused on challenging talented readers or using the pedagogy of gifted education (e.g., critical and creative problem solving and thinking, curriculum differentiation, independent study, self-selected products) to encourage advanced reading (Jackson & Roller, 1993; Reis & Renzulli, 1989). In one study of average and above-

average readers, Taylor and Frye (1988) found that 78% to 88% of fifth and sixth grade average and above average readers could pass pretests on basal comprehension skills before they were covered in the basal reader. The average readers performed at approximately 92% accuracy, while the better readers performed at 93% accuracy on the comprehension skills pretests. No recent study has examined reading instruction for talented readers, and the topic is rarely discussed in the professional literature or at conferences. This research study reflected a need expressed by Guthrie, Schafer, Von Secker, and Alban (2000) for research in regular classrooms with teachers who teach reading to students of all achievement levels of students.

As a group, talented readers are characterized as reading earlier than their peers, spending more time reading, and reading a greater variety of literature, even into adulthood (Collins & Kortner, 1995; Halsted, 1990). These students typically read at least two grade levels above their chronological grade placement, demonstrate advanced understanding of language, use an expansive vocabulary, perceive relationships between and among characters, and grasp complex ideas (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooley, 1993; Levande, 1993). Talented readers' skills are advanced relative to their peers and they may not profit from conventional instruction in reading (Levande, 1999). Like all students, talented students benefit from diagnostically based instruction to ensure that their skills continually improve.

Differentiation is an attempt to address the variation of learners in the classroom through multiple approaches that modify instruction and curriculum to match the individual needs of students (Tomlinson, 2000). Tomlinson (1995) emphasized that when teachers differentiate the curriculum, they are not dispensers of knowledge but organizers of learning opportunities. Differentiation of instruction and curriculum suggests that students are provided with materials and work of varied levels of difficulty with scaffolding, diverse kinds of grouping, and different time schedules (Tomlinson, 2000).

Renzulli (Renzulli, 1977; 1988; Renzulli & Reis, 1997) defined differentiation as encompassing five dimensions: content, process, products, classroom, and the teacher's own efforts. The differentiation of *content* involves adding more depth to the curriculum by focusing on concepts and structure of knowledge. The differentiation of *process* incorporates the use of various instructional strategies (such as acceleration) and materials to enhance and motivate various learning styles of students. The differentiation of *products* enhances students' cognitive development ability by encouraging their ability to express themselves in a variety of ways. To differentiate in the *classroom*, teachers change grouping formats and the physical environment. Last, teachers can differentiate their *own teaching efforts* through artistic modification to share personal knowledge of topics related to curriculum as well as personal interests, collections, hobbies, and enthusiasm about issues surrounding content area.

The most common differentiation strategy to meet the needs of advanced readers is reading acceleration that provides advanced readers with reading material that is above their current grade level. Another suggested strategy is enriching the reading curriculum

with more challenging supplementary materials. Polette (1982) suggested that talented readers should receive training in higher level thinking skills, critical reading, vocabulary development, wide exposure to literature, productive thinking, imaginative thinking, visualization, and exploration of values.

All students should have the opportunity to participate in appropriate learning experiences, and differentiated instruction should enable all learners to experience continuous progress in reading. Teaching reading with materials that the majority of students in a heterogeneous classroom can read may create boredom for talented readers (Renzulli & Reis, 1989), contributing to diminished achievement in reading, particularly in urban areas or low socio-economic areas, where remedial and direct instruction is often the norm.

Research Methodology

This qualitative, comparative cross-case study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994) of talented third and seventh grade readers examined the classroom practices used by 12 different classroom teachers in 11 different schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How was regular reading instruction modified for talented readers in 12 third and seventh grade classrooms?
2. What resources were available and used with talented readers in either the classroom or the school?

Cross-case analysis was conducted during one academic year using data from 135 days of observations in urban and suburban elementary and middle schools. Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that studying multiple cases can increase generalizability. Case study methodology is appropriate when researchers attempt to describe contextual conditions (Yin, 1994) and the comparative case study approach has been suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (2001), and Yin (1994) as an appropriate methodology for in-depth study of a number of cases to make analytical generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Researchers used observations for the "systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79). During school visits, observations were guided by an established procedure that encompassed students' participation in all aspects of their reading instruction. Students were observed in their classroom over multiple visits and teachers were interviewed several times. The researchers' goal was to describe the classroom reading experiences for all readers and then to focus on different reading curriculum or instruction provided for talented readers. While the classroom was the main focus of observation, researchers

gained additional information from interviews with the librarian/media specialist, reading coordinator, and principal at each site. These semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore a few general topics to gain information in "the subjects' own words" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135) regarding the experiences of talented students in their reading classrooms.

Participants also provided appropriate documents, including reading curriculum guides; reading textbooks or basal programs; district policies about reading; assessment information; examples of students' reading logs; student writing portfolios; and any other documentation the classroom teacher, principal, librarian, and reading specialist could provide for a clearer understanding of the reading program. The review of documents provided a clearer picture of the classroom reading culture being studied. The total field study transpired across one academic year until data saturation was reached, when information yielded became redundant and no longer offered useful reinforcement of previously learned information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Data analysis was conducted using techniques designed by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) and coincided with data collection, affecting the collection of additional data. Data analysis techniques included the use of a coding paradigm described by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as well as coding suggested by the same researchers including three levels: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involved unrestricted coding of all data included in field notes, interviews, and other pertinent documents. As the researchers verified codes and determined relationships among and between codes, a determination was made about the relationship of a code to a category. After initial categories were established, axial coding enabled relationships to be identified among the multiple categories that emerged in open coding and, ultimately, resulted in the conceptualization of one or more categories selected as "core." A core category accounted for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior. In the final stage, selective coding, the relationships among categories were examined to determine the saturation of categories in the identification of the core category.

Summary of Findings

Reading instruction in the classes observed generally included a combination of the use of basal readers with some trade books; limited reading strategy instruction was observed in any classroom. In three classrooms, regular curriculum reading practices were enriched and modified for talented readers some of the time with the use of a combination of strategies. Minimal instructional differentiation was provided for talented readers in two other classrooms. In the other seven classrooms, no evidence was found that any differentiated instruction was provided during any observation for talented readers. Multiple resources were available and differentiation strategies were familiar to some classroom teachers, but few were used to meet the needs of talented readers in these classrooms. For example, instructional grouping was available and used in several classrooms, but instructional grouping was employed without differentiation of content or choice, resulting in little meaningful change or challenge for talented readers. In other

words, if talented readers were grouped together but looked for web sites of their favorite rock stars or read simple books during that time, they seldom were challenged as readers.

Every classroom teacher discussed the pressure that he or she had experienced from building, district, and state administrators to "bring up the scores" of their lowest reading students. Most teachers also reported that this pressure resulted in the use of less creative and innovative methods that teachers were led to believe would help to improve the scores. As teachers continue to experience pressure to improve test scores, fewer opportunities for creative challenges in reading may be provided to all students and continuous progress in reading may be thwarted in talented readers.

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CHAPTER 1: Analysis of Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

How often are talented readers challenged or enabled to read at their level or slightly above their level in reading classes? In this study, researchers investigated the ways in which regular reading instructional practices were modified or enriched for talented readers, and whether talented readers were grouped for instruction. Researchers also studied if different curricular materials or instructional strategies were used with this group and whether appropriately challenging reading books were available either in their classroom or in the school library. Current research suggests that children enter kindergarten with a very wide range of skills and degrees of readiness (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000) and consistently indicates that reading achievement is the most important factor in school success (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). No recent study has examined the nature of reading classroom instruction for talented reading students, yet related research found that many academically talented students receive little differentiation of curriculum and instruction, and spend a great deal of time in school doing work they have already mastered (Archambault et al., 1993; Reis et al., 1993; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993). This research was conducted to learn more about the reading instructional experiences of a group of students that is rarely studied and to examine practices that occur with this population in 12 diverse classrooms.

Review of Related Research

Little research has focused on challenging talented readers or using the pedagogy of gifted education (e.g., critical and creative problem solving and thinking, acceleration, curriculum modification and differentiation, independent study, advanced content, self-selected interest-based opportunities) to encourage and develop advanced reading (Jackson & Roller, 1993; Reis & Renzulli, 1989). In one study of average and above-

average readers, Taylor and Frye (1988) found that 78% to 88% of fifth and sixth grade average and above average readers could pass pretests on basal comprehension skills before they were covered in the basal reader. The average readers performed at approximately 92% accuracy, while the better readers performed at 93% accuracy on the comprehension skills pretests. No recent study has examined the nature of reading instruction for talented readers, the topic is rarely discussed in the professional literature or at conferences, and no consensus exists on how to define this population, making research more challenging. This study reflected a need expressed by Guthrie, Schaefer, Von Secker, and Alvan (2000) for research in regular classrooms with teachers who provide reading instruction to students of all achievement levels.

Definitions and Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Readers

Identifying the characteristics of and defining talented readers is challenging, as no consensus has been reached about how to define this group. Research indicates that not all gifted students are talented readers, and not all talented readers are academically gifted (Durkin, 1966; Jackson, 1988). Characteristics of academically gifted students vary as gifted and talented learners are not homogeneous, but some common characteristics exist in this population and have been summarized in Table 1. As Passow (1981) explained, "Despite the tremendous variation which exists among a group of gifted and talented children, they do have many characteristics which differentiate them from other learners" (p. 3). Most current research suggests that gifted students' general learning characteristics differ from average learners in several ways. They usually learn faster than others; have the capacity to find, solve, and act on problems more readily; have a developed use of thinking skills, and understand and make connections about abstract concepts ideas more easily (Feldhusen, 1986; Gallagher, 1985; Keating; 1976; Renzulli & Smith, 1978; Sternberg, 1985).

Mason and Au (1990) defined talented readers as having exceptional reading ability and the capacity to understand textual information well above what would be expected of other students in their age group. Dole and Adams (1983) offered a similar definition of talented readers as students

> . . . reading approximately two or more years above grade level as measured by a standardized reading test, or children who may not have achieved two or more years above grade level on a standardized reading test, but who have been identified as intellectually gifted with potential for high reading performance. (p. 66)

Table 1

Characteristics of Talented Readers

Enjoyment in the reading process:	Read avidly and with enjoyment Use reading differently for different reading purposes Demonstrate thirst for insight and knowledge satisfied through reading Pursue varied interests in and curiosity about texts View books and reading as a way to explore the richness of life Seek and enjoy depth and complexity in reading Develop a deeper understanding of particular topics through reading Demonstrate preferences for non-fiction Pursue interest-based reading opportunities
Read early and above level:	Read at least two grade levels above chronological grade placement Begin reading early and may be self-taught
Advanced Processing:	Retain a large quantity of information for retrieval Automatically integrate prior knowledge and experience in reading Utilize higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis Process information and thoughts at an accelerated pace Synthesize ideas in a comprehensive way Perceive unusual relationships and integrate ideas Grasp complex ideas and nuances
Advanced Language Skills:	Enjoy the subtleties and complexities of language Demonstrate advanced understanding of language Use expansive vocabulary Use reading to acquire a large repertoire of language skills Use language for humor Display verbal ability in self-expression Use colorful and descriptive phrasing

(Anderson, Higgins & Wurster, 1985; Baskin & Harris, 1980; Carter, 1982; Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dean, 1998; Dooley, 1993; Durkin, 1966; Halsted, 1994; Jackson, 1988; Kaplan, 1999; Renzulli & Reis, 1989; Savage, 1983; Southern & Jones, 1992; Stanley, 1989; Trezise, 1978; Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1991; VanTassel-Baska, 1996)

Work in the last two decades has focused on identifying some of the characteristics of this group, although no common list of research-based characteristics exists. Recent work, based more often on anecdotal information than research, suggests that talented readers read earlier than their peers, read at least two grade levels above their chronological grade placement, begin to read early and may be self-taught (Kaplan, 1999;

Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1991). It also suggests that these students are avid, enthusiastic, voracious readers who use reading differently for different purposes (Kaplan, 1999); spend more time reading than their peers, and read a greater variety of literature into adulthood (Collins & Kortner, 1995; Halsted, 1990). Halsted (1994) also found that talented readers understand language subtleties, use language for humor, write words and sentences early, and produce superior creative writing. Additionally, it has been suggested that they automatically integrate prior knowledge and experience into their reading, utilize higher-order thinking skills such as analysis; synthesis; and evaluation, and communicate these ideas (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Several researchers indicate that they display verbal ability in self-expression, use colorful and descriptive phrasing, demonstrate advanced understanding of language, have an expansive vocabulary, perceive relationships between and among characters, and grasp complex ideas (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooley, 1993; Levande, 1993).

Anecdotal information suggests that talented readers possess an unusual capacity to process information as well as an ability to process thoughts at an accelerated pace, synthesize ideas in a comprehensive way, perceive unusual relationships and integrate ideas (Clark, 1997). They may display an advanced ability to understand a variety of texts (Bonds & Bonds, 1983; Halsted, 1994; Levande, 1999; Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1991) and have other language-related abilities, such as the ability to retain a large quantity of information, as well as advanced comprehension, varied interests and curiosity in texts, and high level language development and verbal ability (Clark, 1997). Talented readers understand books to be a way to acquire information, clarify ideas, stimulate the imagination, and deepen understanding (Carter, 1982; Halsted, 1994). McIntosh (1982) and Kaplan (2001) report that highly able readers often have preferences for science, history, biography, travel, poetry, and informational texts such as atlases, encyclopedias, and how-to books. Jackson (1988) has identified advanced reading as a complex process made up of many subskills that vary within the advanced-reader population, and that is one reason that a common definition is difficult. It is also important to note that talented readers' skills are usually considered advanced relative to their peers (Levande, 1999) and that a common definition is challenging as peer groups vary. Halsted (1994) identified a pattern for young talented readers that may change throughout their academic life, finding that they initially teach themselves how to read before they start school, are independent readers by second grade, know their favorite authors by third grade, and have well-established reading patterns by fifth grade. Unfortunately, their reading level may drop off by the time they reach middle school as a result of increased participation in extracurricular activities or an absence of challenge in reading in school (Renzulli & Reis, 1989).

Academic and Instructional Needs of Talented Readers

Allington (2002) has found that research supports the need for all students to interact with appropriately complex books. Talented readers especially need opportunities to challenge themselves and their abilities, and to engage and think about complex texts. Renzulli and Reis (1989) found that many talented readers do not profit from conventional instruction in reading. Since most would agree that talented readers

benefit from appropriate levels of challenge, it is unfortunate that current research indicates they seldom receive it (Archambault et al., 1993). In one study, in-depth observations were conducted to determine if and how classroom teachers meet the needs of gifted and talented students in regular classrooms (Westberg et al., 1993). Two students, one high ability student and one average ability student, were observed using a quantitative observation checklist. Results indicated little differentiation in instructional and curricular practices occurred for gifted and talented students in the regular classroom. Across five subject areas and 92 observation days, gifted and talented or high ability students experienced no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated (Westberg et al., 1993).

Methods for differentiating curriculum and instruction for talented readers do exist, and some research supports the effectiveness of specific instructional and curricular strategies for use with talented readers. For example, the use of instructional level grouping has been successful with talented readers, resulting in increased understanding and enjoyment in literature (Levande, 1999). In general, grouping academically talented students together for instruction has been found to produce positive achievement outcomes when the curriculum provided to students in different groups is appropriately differentiated (Gentry, 1999; Kulik & Kulik, 1991). In other words, it is the instruction that occurs within groups that makes grouping an appropriate instructional strategy (Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Rogers, 1991). Additional strategies found to be successful with talented readers include curriculum compacting (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1995). In this process, assessment procedures are used to learn what the student already knows, documenting that knowledge and replacing what is known with more challenging material, some of which is based on students' interests. In a recent study (Reis et al., 1993), curriculum compacting was used to differentiate the curriculum to accommodate the specific strengths of academically talented students. A sample of 280 second through sixth grade classroom teachers from 20 school districts throughout the country who received minimal levels of professional development eliminated 49% of regular reading curricular content for the 440 gifted and talented students identified in their classrooms, with no differences were observed in posttest achievement scores between treatment and control groups in reading comprehension. These teachers were able to assess which areas of the curriculum could be compacted but they had difficulty in replacing the curriculum that they eliminated with high quality work.

After work that students already know has been eliminated, the challenge for teachers is to differentiate reading instruction with selections of high quality literature geared toward the students' level rather than age (Renzulli, 1977), gear instruction toward the students' strengths and interests (Renzulli & Reis, 1989; 1997), provide students with advanced content that enables them to interact with depth and complexity (Kaplan, 1999), and focus on developing higher level comprehension skills (Collins & Kortner, 1995). The use of higher level questioning and opportunities to incorporate prior knowledge into their reading experience can also enable talented readers to build upon previous strengths. Book discussion groups can also provide talented readers with the opportunity to interact with intellectual peers and to discuss their ideas in greater depth (Great Books, Great Books Foundation, 2001). Halsted (1990) suggests that these discussions should be

facilitated by a teacher, librarian, or volunteer, rather than student-led and that they should focus on themes and ideas, rather than on facts and plot summaries.

One universal finding has emerged from the limited research on practices for talented readers and that is that regular reading instruction is often too easy for talented readers (Chall & Conard, 1991; Collins & Aiex, 1995; Dole & Adams, 1983; Reis, Hébert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995; Reis & Renzulli, 1989; Shrenker, 1997). This finding is explained by Chall and Conard (1991):

> Another group not adequately served was those who read about two grades or more above the norm. Their reading textbooks, especially, provided little or no challenge, since they were matched to students' grade placement, not their reading levels. Many students were aware of this and said, in their interviews, that they preferred harder books because they learned harder words and ideas from them. Since harder reading textbooks are readily available, one may ask why they were not used with the more able readers, as were the easier reading textbooks for the less able readers. (p. 111)

The appropriate match between a learner's abilities and the difficulty of the instructional work has been called the optimal match that occurs when instruction is slightly above the learner's current level of functioning. As Chall and Conard (1991) state, when the match is optimal, learning is enhanced; however, "if the match is not optimal [i.e., the match is below or above the child's level of understanding/knowledge], learning is less efficient and development may be halted" (p. 19). Using textbooks that are several years below students' reading level may create halted development as well as motivational problems for talented readers who regard reading as an effortless process. For example, in a longitudinal study (Reis et al., 1995) of academically talented students who either achieved or underachieved in a large urban high school in the same district of three of the schools in this study, underachieving students consistently acknowledged that the easy curriculum they encountered in elementary and middle school failed to prepare them for the rigors of challenging classes in high school. Gifted and talented high school students who underachieved in school believed that their problems began because of particularly easy elementary school experiences, and most mentioned a lack of challenge in reading. These young people reported that they never learned to work, primarily because their elementary and middle school experiences had been too easy, which directly affected their high school experiences. They consistently reported that their classes and academic tasks were "too easy," and discussed "breezing" through elementary school, indicating that schoolwork required no effort. Students reported that they did not acquire appropriate opportunities to develop important academic skills or rudimentary study skills. According to the data gathered in this study, students' work habits and self-discipline, both in their classrooms and at home, were not properly developed.

Strategies to Differentiate Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Differentiation attempts to address the variations among learners in the classroom through multiple approaches that enrich, modify, and adapt instruction and curriculum to

match students' individual needs (Renzulli, 1977; 1988; Tomlinson, 2000). Tomlinson (1995) emphasized that in differentiating the curriculum, teachers are not dispensers of knowledge but organizers of learning opportunities. Differentiation of instruction and curriculum suggests that students can be provided with materials and work of varied levels of difficulty through scaffolding, enrichment, acceleration, diverse kinds of grouping, and different time schedules (Tomlinson, 2000).

Renzulli (Renzulli, 1977; 1988; Renzulli & Reis, 1997) defined differentiation as encompassing five dimensions: content, process, products, classroom organization and management, and a teacher's own efforts. The differentiation of *content* involves adding more depth to the curriculum by focusing on principles, concepts and structures of knowledge. The differentiation of *process* incorporates the use of various instructional strategies and materials to enhance and motivate various students' learning styles. The differentiation of *products* enhances students' cognitive and creative development by encouraging them to express themselves in a variety of genres and non-verbal formats. To differentiate *classroom organization and management*, teachers can change grouping formats (for example, interest, task, instructional level), the physical environment, and allocations of time and the use of technology, space within the classroom, school, and community. Finally, teachers can differentiate their *own teaching efforts* through artistic modification, a process that encourages them to share personal knowledge of topics related to curriculum as well as personal interests, collections, hobbies, and enthusiasm about issues surrounding content area.

The most common strategy suggested in the literature to meet the needs of advanced readers is to accelerate them in reading by providing them with material that is above their current grade level. Another suggested strategy is enriching the reading curriculum with more challenging supplementary materials. Trezise (1978) found that grouping talented readers together to read and discuss books of different reading levels sharing a common theme worked better than simply having all students in a class read and discuss the same book. When this approach is used, talented readers are provided with opportunities to discuss challenging themes in relation to several different literary works. Advanced readers may also benefit from reading programs that stress the development of critical and creative thinking skills, such as the Junior Great Books program, the opportunity to discuss controversial issues, participation in less structured teaching activities, various types and levels of enrichment, or instructional or curriculum differentiation such as curriculum compacting. In summary, the strategies suggested in Table 2 can be used to differentiate instruction and curriculum for talented readers along the dimensions discussed by Renzulli (1988). These strategies are not mutually exclusive. For example, curriculum compacting uses assessment that may lead to advanced content and products for students, but this strategy requires personal efforts by teachers to find appropriately challenging resources and materials, and will require some classroom changes, such as finding space for students to work together and for storing advanced materials.

Table 2

Differentiated Instructional or Curricular Strategies to Challenge Talented Readers

Curriculum Compacting	Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992; Reis & Renzulli, 1992; Reis et al., 1995
Acceleration	Dooley, 1993; Durkin, 1966; Jackson, 1988; Stanley, 1989; Southern & Jones, 1992
Substitution of regular reading material with more advanced trade books or basal material	Durkin, 1990; Renzulli, Smith, & Reis, 1982; Savage, 1983; VanTassel-Baska, 1996
Appropriate use of technology and the web	Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Leu, 2000; 2001
More complex assigned reading	Baskin & Harris, 1980; Halsted, 1994; Hauser & Nelson, 1988
More complex assigned writing	Dean, 1998
Independent reading choices	Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Savage, 1983
Independent writing options	Davis & Johns, 1989
Independent study opportunities	Feldhusen, 1986; Renzulli, 1977; Treffinger & Barton, 1988
Grouping changes (within class or across classes)	Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Rogers, 1991; Sandby-Thomas, 1983
Thematic instructional changes for talented readers (tiered reading for thematic units)	Kaplan, 2001
Independent project choices based on student interests	McPhail, Pierson, Freeman, Goodman, & Ayappa, 2000; Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1989; 1997
Substitution of regular reading instructional strategies with other options	Bates, 1984; Baum, 1985; Dean, 1998; Dooley, 1993; Levande, 1993; Mangieri & Madigan, 1984; McCormick & Swassing, 1982; Reis & Renzulli, 1989
Great Books or Literature Circles	Daniels, 1994
Readers' and/or Writers' Workshop	Graves, 1983, 1994
Time spent in the gifted program instead of regular reading class	Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992; Renzulli & Reis, 1989; 1997; Vaughn, Feldhusen, & Asher, 1991
Advanced Questioning Skills	Bloom et al., 1956
Interest Assessment and interest-based reading opportunities	Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1989; 1997

All students should have opportunities to participate in appropriate learning experiences, and differentiated instruction can be used to ensure that all learners experience continuous progress and increase their performance in reading. Teaching reading with materials that the majority of students in a heterogeneous classroom can read may create boredom for talented readers (Renzulli & Reis, 1989) and contribute to diminished achievement in reading, particularly in urban areas or low socio-economic areas, where remedial and direct instruction are often used.

Research Methodology

This qualitative, comparative cross-case study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994) of talented third and seventh grade readers examined the classroom practices used by 12 different classroom teachers in 11 different schools. Cross-case analysis was conducted during various times in an academic year using data from 135 days of observations in urban and suburban elementary and middle schools. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated: "One aim of studying multiple cases is to increase generalizability. At a deeper level, the aim is to see processes and outcomes across many cases and thus to develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations" (p. 172). Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (2001) and Yin (1994) suggest the use of qualitative comparative case study as an appropriate methodology for the in-depth study of a number of cases to make analytical generalizations.

Researchers used observations for the "systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79). During school visits, observations were guided by an established procedure that encompassed classroom observations to summarize reading instruction for all students, followed by observations to identify the differentiated reading practices that occurred for talented readers. This procedure involved time spent understanding the routine of regular reading instruction in each of 12 diverse classrooms and the subsequent identification of any differentiation strategies used for reading instruction for talented readers. These strategies, used by all researchers, summarized differentiate reading practices across the dimensions specified by Renzulli (1988).

Erlandson et al. (1993) advocated gathering qualitative data from a variety of sources in a variety of ways, and in this study, data were collected and analyzed in 5 phases. Phase one occurred as schools, classrooms, and talented reading students were identified for inclusion in the study. This phase included contacting superintendents and principals who agreed to participation and their subsequent nomination of a third or seventh grade classroom teacher who was acknowledged to be competent in teaching reading. An agreement was provided for teacher and school anonymity through the process of multiple classroom visits, interviews with principals, reading consultants, media specialists/librarians, classroom teachers, and gifted program coordinators. Schools and classrooms were selected using various criteria including diversity of reading programs used and type of school and district. A conscious attempt was made to

include districts using different basal programs as well as a blend of direct instruction and whole language opportunities. An attempt was also made to include schools from urban, suburban, and rural sites, and a decision was made to study urban and suburban schools within close proximity to each other. For example, three pairs of urban and suburban elementary schools included in the study from three separate school districts were less than 5 miles apart. Each was at the geographic end of one district and the beginning of another and, in each pair, one school was classified as urban and the other as suburban. Geographic convenience was also considered with a limit of a 1 hour, one-way drive for researchers.

The use of assessment in the reading program was also carefully considered. Each school reading consultant and principal was interviewed by telephone before initial visits were scheduled and careful consideration was given to issues related to assessment. These observations occurred in a state with a very challenging state mastery test and third grade and seventh grade classrooms were selected because these are the years in which multiple assessments take place to prepare students for the mastery tests taken in fourth and eighth grades. In addition to state assessments in reading and writing to prepare for these state mastery tests, each selected district used a comprehensive assessment process in reading including, the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) given 3-4 times annually, state writing rubrics administered multiple times each year, and a series of practice assessments given consistently throughout the year to prepare for the state mastery test. In addition, each district reading consultant and teacher used additional assessment strategies that enabled them to readily identify students' reading levels and strengths and weaknesses in each selected classroom.

Phase two involved semi-structured interviews with participating principals, reading consultants or teachers, librarians or media specialists, and gifted program coordinators, using interview protocols developed for this study. In this phase, participating district personnel also provided appropriate documents including reading curriculum guides, reading textbooks or basal programs, district policies about reading, assessment information about reading, examples of students' reading logs, student writing portfolios, and any other documentation the classroom teacher, principal, librarian, and reading specialist could provide for a clearer understanding of the reading program. These documents were carefully reviewed and used in the case studies as well as for clarification in follow-up interviews. These interviews lasted from 1 to 2 hours during which time, field notes were taken and/or in some sessions, taped recordings were made with permission and later transcribed. This protocol included questions about the reading program, access to classroom and school libraries, local, state and national testing results, perceptions of differentiation provided for all students, as well as opportunities for talented readers. During this phase of the study, selections of classrooms were made depending upon the factors mentioned above and the presence of talented readers in the classrooms.

Identification as a talented reader involved a multi-step process. The state in which the study was conducted has a mandate to identify (but not to serve) academically talented students and each district is required to have a process in place through which

gifted and talented students are identified and parents are notified of this designation. These processes were carefully scrutinized in each participating district with interviews with the gifted program coordinator and a list of third and seventh grade students who were already identified as academically talented was provided to the researchers. This group constituted the first pool for designation as talented in reading in this study. To be identified in the districts selected requires a formal process by which at least four criteria are considered: scoring in the top 3-5% of intelligence or other aptitude tests; teacher nomination as displaying superior achievement in all or at least one content area, high achievement tests (top 3-5%), and outstanding productivity in classroom performance or in content area productivity. This group was then screened carefully through interviews with reading consultants, previous classroom teachers, and principals to verify that the students in this initial group were also talented readers. Part of this screening involved the provision of a list of characteristics similar to those outlined in Table 1. For example, in one urban school of 1,040, only 11 seventh graders had been identified as gifted and talented students in the state audit and interviews with sixth grade teachers, reading consultants, and the gifted program teacher resulted in the designation of 5 of these 11 seventh grade students as talented readers. Once these students were nominated, the most recent school records were reviewed, including the state assessments in reading, and current teachers were provided with a checklist of characteristics of talented readers. This process resulted in the final designation as talented readers. It is important to note that the talented readers identified for the study were not synonymous with students in the highest reading groups. A wide range of abilities and achievement levels in reading were found within these groups, with the widest range found in urban classrooms. For example, in urban sites using flexible reading groups within heterogeneous classrooms, high reading group membership included students slightly above their chronological grade in reading all the way through students who were reading several grade levels above their current grade placement. In reality, these high reading groups were quite heterogeneous, encompassing spreads in reading achievement of up to 6 grade levels. Demographic information about participating schools, classrooms, and identified talented readers are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

School Demographics

School Name	School Grade Level	Type of Community	SES	Population	% of Students at State Goal in Reading/ Writing (R=Reading, W=Writing)	Number of Books in Library (S=School Library, C=Classroom Library)
Betsy Ross Public School	Middle	Suburban	Medium	650	R72, W69	S = 14,000 C = 340
Center Public School	Middle	Urban	Low	836	R35, W38	S = 11,000 C = 0
Connor Elementary	Elementary	Urban	Low	277	R20, W19	S = 8,808 C_1 = 100 C_2 = 0
Empire Middle School	Elementary	Suburban	Medium	257	R52, W65	S = 6,810 C = 400
James Madison School	Elementary	Mixed	Low	330	R49, W49	S = 12,738 C = 300
North Corner School	Elementary	Urban	Low	520	R 26, W 9	S = 5,989 C = 100
Nutmeg Center School	Middle	Urban	Low	564	R 15, W8	S = 7,500 C = 0
Roosevelt Public School	Middle	Urban	Low	1,040	R37, W26	S = 13,312 C = 100
Rosa Parks Middle School	Elementary	Urban	Low	511	R9, W20	S = 5,800 C = 120
Southside Elementary	Elementary	Suburban	High	471	R76, W74	S = 10,300 C = 50
Strong Porter School	Middle	Suburban	Medium	687	R 63, W39	S = 9,274 C = 200

Table 4

Student and Classroom Demographics

School Name	Grade Level Classroom Observed	Number of Students in Classroom	Number of Talented Reading Students in Classroom	Number of Reading Class Observations	Percent of Non-English Home Language (NE) and English Language Learners (ELL)	Student Diversity W=White O=Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American	Percent of Students on Free or Reduced Lunch
Betsy Ross Middle School	7	21	4	13	NE-6 ELL-2	W-86% O-14%	15
Center Public School (class 1)	3	25	2	12	NE- 69 ELL-4	W-10% O-90%	64
Center Public School (class 2)	7	23	3	12	NE- 69 ELL-4	W-10% O-90%	64
Connor Elementary	3	24	2	9	NE- 42 ELL-28	W-34% O-66%	72
Empire School	3	18	5	8	NE- 17 ELL-3	W-10% O-90%	18
James Madison School	3	25	3	8	NE- 26 ELL-11	W-45% O-55%	33
North Corner School	3	24	3	14	NE- 83 ELL-32	W-5% O-95%	80
Nutmeg Center School		26	4	13	NE- 38 ELL-12	W-13% O-87%	47
Roosevelt Public School	7	25	5	8	NE- 16 ELL-14	W-46% O-54%	63
Rosa Parks School	7	24	6 (3 in reading class-3 in math class)	9	NE- 17 ELL-5	W-1% O-99%	46
Southside Elementary	3	23	3	7	NE- 8 ELL-5	W-85% O-15%	10
Strong Porter School	7	25	2	8	NE- 2 ELL-0	W-97% O-3%	12

Phase three focused on data collection in the classrooms selected for observations, with daily direct observations and interviews that addressed research questions (Yin, 1994). Open-ended and focused interviews, some of which were recorded and later transcribed, and were also conducted to explore and elaborate specific issues as they emerged (Yin, 1994). Direct observations were recorded in field notes, and teachers were interviewed to discuss relevant observations and probe participant responses more fully (Yin, 1994). Teachers were initially interviewed at the beginning of the site visits, then briefly after each observation for at least 9 observations spread across the fall, winter, and spring of a recent academic year. Principals, reading consultants, and librarians were interviewed at the beginning of the study and then again as needed throughout for clarification and additional information. These semi-structured interviews included open-ended questions designed to explore a few general topics to gain information in "the subjects' own words" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135) regarding the experiences of talented students in their reading classrooms. For example, teachers were asked about the ways they had tried to motivate students to read in the classroom as a grand tour question and a more specific follow-up question was, "Do you encourage your most talented readers to read appropriately challenging books?"

The researchers' goals were to first describe the classroom reading experiences for all readers and then to focus on different reading curriculum or instructional strategies provided for talented readers. Participants' responses to the general questions guided the direction of the interview with the goal of obtaining a deeper understanding of issues related to whether and how they have tried to meet the needs of talented readers. After learning to understand the nature of regular reading instruction, researchers then analyzed whether and how that regular reading instruction may have varied or been differentiated for identified talented readers using the established list of possible differentiated reading strategies and the dimensions outlined by Renzulli (1988). After numerous observations, researchers wrote summaries of regular classroom reading and writing activities and the differentiation practices used by classroom teachers.

Phase four included transcription of previously collected data and the collection of follow-up data, designed to further elaborate, confirm, or explore issues that emerged during the previous phases. Field notes, and a reflexive journal recording the researchers' reactions, and descriptions of events in the study were maintained as part of the audit trail to facilitate triangulation and cross validation from the methods and sources (Erlandson et al., 1993). Data analysis continued with the review of field notes and summaries of regular reading instruction as well as reading strategies used with talented readers. The total field study transpired across one academic year until data saturation was reached, when information yielded became redundant and no longer offered useful reinforcement of previously learned information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Member checks were completed in most districts as reading consultants, teachers, and principals were asked to review the case studies and respond to inaccuracies or misperceptions, and follow-up interviews were conducted with all persons previously interviewed to probe any discrepancies or questions. Research team members met weekly to review and code all data both independently and then collectively, and to question audit trails and each other's codes.

Phase five included the corroboration of initial findings and continued data analysis during ongoing observations as students were observed in their classrooms during multiple visits. Data analysis was conducted using techniques designed by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) that coincided with data collection, affecting the collection of additional data, as indicated in the phase descriptions. Coding and analysis of case study data began with phase one and continued until the conclusion of the observations and individual case study development. Data analysis techniques included the use of a coding paradigm described by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as well as coding suggested by the same researchers including three levels: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involved unrestricted coding of all data included in field notes, interviews, and other pertinent documents. For example, in this study, open codes related to reading instruction for talented readers involved freedom of choice of book, grouping patterns, independent writing assignments, the opportunity to work with another student, or using the same or different materials during regular reading instruction. As the researchers verified codes and determined relationships among and between codes, a determination was made about the relationship of a code to a category. After initial categories were established, axial coding enabled relationships to be identified among the multiple categories that emerged in open coding. For example, the various ways in which students were grouped for reading instruction reading assignments, free choice reading, writing opportunities, homework, and basal reading activities resulted in an axial code relating to student groupings by interest, reading level, and method of differentiation. Ultimately, this process resulted in the conceptualization of one or more categories selected as "core," the category accounted for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior (Strauss, 1987, p. 34). In the final stage, selective coding, the relationships among categories were examined to determine the saturation of categories in the identification of a core category, and in this study, the core category that emerged was the limited differentiation provided for talented readers. Triangulation, using a number of sources, was used to support objective validity claims, clarify meaning, and verify perceptions for individual case studies, and cross case analyses (Erlandsen et al., 1993; Yin, 1994). Individual case studies were compared and contrasted on a regular basis and the axial and core categories were identified and verified during regular research team meetings.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How was regular reading instruction modified for talented readers in 12 third and seventh grade classrooms?
2. What resources were available and used with talented readers in either the classroom or the school?

Sample

Twelve different third and seventh grade classrooms from 11 urban and suburban schools in the Northeastern part of the United States were included in this study,

representing a range of low to high socio-economic districts in diverse areas, as indicated by school demographic data and library and classroom library information presented in Tables 3 and 4. As noted, schools were selected for both geographic convenience and diversity and a representative sample of classrooms from a wide variety of districts were included.

Classroom teachers in the study represented a broad range of experience, from a beginning teacher who had taught for 2 years to the most experienced teacher who had taught for 35 years. Eight of the teachers had between 8 and 15 years of experience. Numbers of years of teaching did not seem to be associated with ability to differentiate, as the teachers who did the most in this regard had taught for 5, 10, and 12 years, respectively. Three teachers were male and the other 9 were female. Advanced degrees (Master's and beyond—professional certificates) had been attained by 11 of the 12 classroom teachers observed. This is not surprising as an advanced degree or 30 graduate credits is one of the requirements to maintain certification in the state in which the study took place.

Limitations

Techniques discussed by Marshall and Rossman (1989) were used to establish the trustworthiness of this study. For example, other researchers from The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) played "devil's advocate" to question critically all researchers' analyses and to identify negative instances. Researchers checked and rechecked the data, conducted purposeful testing of rival hypotheses, asked questions of the data, and conducted member checks and an audit of the data collection and analytic methods. Multiple researchers from the team visited each site to ensure accuracy of the observations and the trustworthiness of this investigation was enhanced by the use of interviews and field notes. These enabled all researchers to examine and clarify information; triangulate across methods; check depth of detail; and continue to cross-check with other research team members for accuracy. The methods, procedures, and strategies used to ensure accuracy included observations of informants in various settings; interviews with teachers, principals, librarians, reading specialists; and document review.

Findings

Similar findings were found across all classrooms related to general reading instruction for all students as well as differentiated instruction provided for talented readers. The major finding and core category was the absence of differentiated instruction for talented readers who received some challenge in 3 classrooms, but limited opportunities in the other 9 classrooms. The absence of differentiation for talented readers was identified as the core category in this study. The differentiated reading practices that were provided for talented students in this study are indicated in Table 5. They include the areas in which researchers had been trained to code as well as given the

opportunity to describe observations in open-ended field notes. It should be noted that the strategies in which no use of differentiation was observed or strategies such as reading groups in which the same materials were used for students across all groups (grouping without differentiation) were not included in the table.

Table 5

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Methods of Instructional Differentiation	Number and Percentage of Teachers Using the Strategy
Curriculum compacting to eliminate work that students had already mastered and replace with challenging options	3 (25%)
Within class grouping for interest or for more challenging activities	3 (25%)
Use of more advanced instruction for groups & individual students	3 (25%)
Use of higher level questioning skills	3 (25%)
Availability of advanced materials	3 (25%)
Gifted pull-out program opportunities during reading or language arts	3 (25%)
Use of classroom libraries with advanced, challenging books	3 (25%)
Integrated enrichment opportunities	3 (25%)
Use of talented readers as role models or group discussion leaders	2 (17%)
Use of technology during reading class	1 (8%)
Replacement of Success For All/direct instruction with standard literature program	2 (17%)

One-fourth (3) of the classroom teachers implemented some of the differentiation strategies usually suggested for this population on some, but not all, of the days in which observations were conducted. The rest did very little to differentiate instruction. Some used grouping practices for separating students into low to high groups, but the curriculum and instruction across reading groups was almost identical. Some groups were farther along in the basal, but no differences were noted in use of any of the strategies mentioned above. Most of the 9 teachers who did not differentiate instruction reported that they had received no prior training, little support, and minimal professional

development in how to provide these services. Most also said that the state assessment procedures had forced them to concentrate on students who were below grade level. Few believed they had readily available resources to make other accommodations for talented readers. Even in the case of the 3 teachers who provided differentiated instruction, some of the opportunities were minimal, such as asking one or two talented readers an advanced question or giving talented readers the opportunity to lead a discussion or expand upon a writing sample. Even the use of a resource room pull-out program for talented students was only provided to 3 students on 1 day over multiple observations. Technology was rarely used with this population despite the availability of computers and access to the web in every classroom and the many web sites that could have challenged advanced readers. In the one classroom in which talented readers had the option to use technology, they were not supervised or provided with suggestions about how to use this tool properly or in a way that would challenge them as readers.

In most classrooms, talented readers were rarely encouraged to select more challenging books. Three of the classroom teachers had a variety of advanced books or resources available in their classrooms, but these materials were not used as part of their daily regular reading instruction with talented readers. All teachers had access to some challenging books available to use with talented readers either in the school library or in the reading consultant's office, but in some schools, particularly in urban settings, these resources were scarce. Hundreds of below level books were available. For example, in 2 urban elementary schools, the reading consultants displayed a room with dozens of rows of bins of books purchased to augment the reading program. The vast majority of these books were on the pre-primer to the fifth grade level. The talented third graders in these schools were all reading well above the fifth and sixth grade level, so availability of resources was an issue. When questioned about whether they helped students to select appropriately challenging books, most classroom teachers said they tried to do this if they could find the time. Implied in this was the representative belief that teachers were morally obligated to spend more time with students who read below grade level. For example, one teacher explained that "I will pull books for less able readers, but I just cannot pick books out for everyone."

Data analysis indicated that the 3 classroom teachers (25%) who provided some challenge for talented readers used three or more differentiation strategies. Each of these classroom teachers worked in suburban schools in which gifted and talented programs were available and 2 of these teachers worked with principals who had prior training and direct experience in addressing the needs of gifted and talented learners. These 2 teachers provided the most intensive and diverse strategies used to meet the needs of talented readers. The strategies included grouping for reading with the use of different trade books, curriculum compacting, opportunities for independent reading and writing choices, as well as book discussion groups. Some advanced instruction was provided for these groups and some advanced materials were used. Other differentiation strategies included the use of advanced questioning skills, pull-out programs for gifted students during reading time, the use of integrated independent work, and integrated enrichment. The combination of several strategies, such as instructional grouping, curriculum compacting, and the use of more challenging trade books for students at different reading

levels, appeared to provide varied opportunities for talented readers to continue to increase their skills.

Reading Instructional Formats

Regular reading instruction for all third and seventh grade students involved a combination of teaching methods for the 90-120 minute reading instruction blocks used in all 12 classrooms. Several initial observations were required to document a format of regular reading instruction. Three of the urban classrooms used Success for All (SFA) (Slavin et al, 1992; Slavin & Madden, 1999; 2000) which is the Johns Hopkins Model for direct instruction. In schools using SFA, 90 minutes of reading instruction were provided daily according to SFA guidelines. The SFA format rarely varied across multiple observations in each of the 3 classrooms using this approach. The format included 20 minutes of listening comprehension, 10 minutes of vocabulary, and a combination of strategies such as silent reading/partner reading; comprehension questions or treasure hunt, 2-minute edit, book club; or sustained silent reading or additional skills instruction for the last 10 minutes. In all other classrooms, the format of reading instruction varied across multiple visits including a combination of basal literature and trade books and a variety of independent spelling and writing programs.

In the other 9 classrooms not using SFA, the combined instructional strategies included a varied combination of general language arts activities such as group reading, buddy reading, embedded writing and spelling instruction, use of trade books, choice of independent reading, and time available for group work, assigned writing, and games. Teachers were not regularly observed teaching specific reading strategies, such as the use of phonics, identifying main idea, or literary concepts. Technology was observed being used in only one third grade classroom on two different observations by a group of talented readers who were searching for fan club web sites of their favorite rock stars. Trade books were used in addition to basal programs in many classrooms by small groups of students, and these books were targeted for on-grade or slightly above or below grade level reading instruction. Brief summaries of two classrooms developed after multiple visits serve as a preview of the case studies. The first summary is of a heterogeneous seventh grade classroom in a suburban middle school in which no differentiation was observed across multiple visits.

> The stated goals of the seventh grade reading program were to develop independent reading skills, comprehension, and the desire to read for pleasure. These whole language-based goals were established with the understanding that phonemic awareness, phonics, and word analysis were the essential skills in students' abilities to decode and comprehend texts. Presently, instructional resources and the library provide teachers with choices from fiction, non-fiction, short stories, and poetry. There are multiple books within a theme or genre available, which allows teachers the option of delving deeper into a unit of study. Currently, teachers have much autonomy in shaping their reading program from the available resources. Given the team structure of the middle school, most teachers who share subjects collaborate closely on their instruction. Seventh

> grade literature teachers coordinate literature selections and activities, and use the same timeline, finding it is easier for them and the students if they begin books at the same time and administer tests on the same day. Seventh grade teachers integrate their reading choices with social studies units. When the students studied Greece and Rome, they read *Ulysses* by Bernard Evslin, based on Homer's *Odyssey*. Through Reserve Reading lists for each grade level and the available guidance of the reading consultants, teachers and students have a variety of texts available for instruction, read alouds, and personal reading. Seventh grade teachers require that students read for homework, usually by setting a time goal. Some seventh teachers allow students to fulfill this assignment with books they are reading for another class or project; others want them to have a book, generally novels, exclusively for that assignment. The goal is for students to have additional practice reading independently, to make reading a habit, and to promote reading for enjoyment.

Seventh grade literature classes follow a similar schedule for almost every class in Betsy Ross Middle School over 13 different observations. Students begin each class with 10 minutes of journal writing in response to their reading the night before in a book of their choice. Then, students read from the book the class was reading as a whole group read aloud, with students assigned to read sections. Then some form of student response occurs using teachers created packets that correspond with the books and students are assigned to take notes from the reading or complete skill activities in these packets. At other times, whole class or small group discussions followed the read aloud.

A summary of a third grade classroom reading period in a suburban school in which differentiation was provided follows:

> Reading instruction in this classroom was rich and diverse. The basal program is used regularly but augmented with class novels and non-fiction. Evidence of alternative assignments for different students was observed and during the course of the morning double block of reading (approximately 2 hours), several different strategies were used with groups of readers at different levels of reading instruction. For example, a small group of children was reading from the basal reader with one teacher, doing what might be called traditional reading instruction. In another corner of the room, an instructional aide worked with students on phonics-based instruction. In another section of the room, students read quietly to themselves from books bearing brightly colored circles on the spine, corresponding to reading levels indicating if books were below, on and above grade level. Constant interaction with print is a clear and stated goal of teachers as they have explained the program prior, during and after class visits. Working with one small group of readers who are not yet at grade level, the teacher cues the students on illustrations to help them prepare to read. She uses a large Venn diagram and explains the characters, events, and main ideas of the story they are about to read.

In another corner of the room, pairs of readers read to each other from the same story. The use of differentiated, alternative reading assignments is used with the pairs who work together and careful planning was obvious in the way this seemingly easy strategy took place over multiple visits. Each pair of readers reads from a trade book that is either above, at, or below grade level. As students begin to read, they meet with their partner, talk about the book, and then read a page to each other. Two instructional aides listen carefully and provide help is needed. Active reading is obvious throughout the classroom. Print resources are widely visible in the room, and adults move carefully around the room during small group breakout times to keep students on track with instruction in reading.

A summary of a third grade classroom lesson in writing in an urban school in which no differentiation was provided follows:

> Writing instruction, observed over several visits was taught in a whole group. During one lesson, the children worked on revising a story they had written and on another observation; they were observed working on their own short books that they are to illustrate. Each student is given a blank, white book (8.5 by 11 inches) with a hard cover and approximately 15 pages. The teacher began the class by reading from what he told the class was a very good example of student writing in a book completed by a third grader last year. The writing component of the Language Arts class is more informal than reading as the whole class is given the same book assignment and instructed to move around the classroom to provide all students with more space and quiet time to write. They understand that they will be illustrating their books and pasting typed lines from their stories on to each page that they will subsequently illustrate. After receiving instructions about adding detail to setting and plot, students break apart into groups and begin writing and/or revising their previous drafts.

Students walk quietly around and chat with each other. The teacher works with small groups of the 19 students in various sections of the class. Some students are much further ahead of others and others are an entry-level stage in writing. Throughout the rest of the hour of writing instruction, the teacher works with small groups of children on the short books they are writing. Near the end of the class, two separate volunteers come into the classroom and indicate that they are available to help. About half of the students get help and the rest work quietly and are on task for the majority of the class. The same instructions, assignments, and expectations are given to all students.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

As noted earlier, the major finding in this study was that talented readers received little differentiated instruction or curriculum in 9 of the 12 reading classrooms observed; instead, students who read well above-grade level usually received instruction and curricular material that was identical to that of students who read significantly below grade level. In 1 third grade urban classroom in Connor Elementary School, talented readers (as well as the rest of the high group of reading of 5 students) received no formal

reading instruction whatsoever in reading on any of 9 observations during a semester of observations from winter to spring. One observation from Connor relating to 2 students is included below:

> The 2 talented readers from the highest reading group search the web in the corner of the room looking for *Three Little Women*, a rock group. The teacher has explained in a previous interview that they are able to do alternative assignments for reading. The students continue to look for information about female rock stars while the other 2 students in the high reading group read self-choice books that are easy picture books reads for any third grader. Neither read chapter books. The talented readers using the web seem happy and giggle with each other when they find a web site about Briteny Spears. After 30 minutes, with the permission of their teacher, the 2 students leave the room to use the bathroom and then go to the library where they sit and chat and look quietly at teen magazines, such as *YM*. There is no interaction with the librarian or any adult. They rarely read during the 55 minutes they spend in the library and glance at magazines. Over 9 visits, these 2 talented readers cause no behavioral or disciplinary problems, read no challenging material (and little of any other content) and appear to be happy in their classroom with the freedom they are given to choose activities. In this classroom, talented readers were observed searching for web sites about their favorite rock stars (Briteny Spears and Christina Aguilera), but no instructions were provided by the classroom teacher about how to use the web or the alternative work these advanced third graders might have pursued. Talented readers were left to work on their own in most of the 8 other days they were observed and during all observations, engaged in the following activities repeatedly. They searched the web, chatted with each other, went to the library to sit or wander around, and read easy books (such as *Babysitter's Club*) that they selected with no guidance from their classroom teacher or librarian. They never selected material that provided them with a challenge in reading or were not assigned to read any chapter books that were at their reading level.

It is important to note that the reading consultant in this school had at least four bins of multiple copies of books that were on the sixth grade level that would have provided challenge and opportunities for discussion if they had been used with this high group of readers. This would have required having someone get the books and deliver them to the classroom, an organized approach to using grouping and different assignments, and time spent with each group on a consistent basis. This was not done. When questioned about whether this reading group ever received any instruction at all, the teacher sighed and replied:

> I try to get to them at least once a week, but I am not always able to do that. You see, so many of my other students read below grade level that it is hard to justify not working with them. Many of these lower readers will be retained in this grade if they do not improve. The top group already reads at grade level, so I rarely have any instructional time to give to them.

When questioned about the 2 talented readers in his class, he indicated that he knew that they read several grade levels above their chronological grade and displayed many of the characteristics listed in Table 1. He discussed, on several occasions, feeling guilty about the minimal time or direction he provided to these students. Although this was not an intervention study, as the year progressed, the teacher began asking the researchers for help with these students, explaining that he did not have the training or time to provide them with even minimal levels of challenge. At the conclusion of the observations, this help was provided as were additional materials targeted for these 2 talented readers. The teacher began to use the multiple copies of books available in the school to challenge some of his more able readers for the last 6 weeks of school. As a result of his participation in the study, the teacher attended a summer conference in which he learned multiple strategies for differentiating for his talented students that could also be applied to enhance his instructional repertoire for other students as well. Other perceptions of classroom teachers related to their use of differentiated instruction and curriculum are summarized in Table 6.

Instructional Grouping

Some instructional grouping was used in 10 of the 12 classrooms in this study, and in most of these classrooms, students were grouped for instruction within their grade level classroom. In the 3 classrooms using the SFA program, students were grouped by instructional level rather than by grade level. Therefore, some third graders who read below grade level were grouped with first or second grade students, while others who read above grade level were grouped with fourth or fifth grade students. In all SFA classrooms, younger readers reading above grade level were grouped with older remedial readers who were reading below grade level, and they received the same instruction within these groups. In one third grade, for example, a talented first grade reader received the same instruction as an on-grade level third grade student and a fifth grade remedial student who were all placed in this third grade level SFA grouping. In the SFA program, student groupings were determined by new assessments, using established SFA procedures, every 8 weeks. The observations in SFA classrooms were complex and involved longer periods of time, as targeted talented readers were observed over various groupings, sometimes in their home reading class and sometimes in their new SFA classes with older students.

Table 6

Representative Classroom Teachers' Perceptions of Practices Benefiting Talented Readers

Betsy Ross Middle School—We use whole group heterogeneous teaching and we always strive to teach to the top with our seventh grade students. We use cooperative grouping in which the most talented students work with other students. We have many very challenging books available on our reading lists but we do not encourage talented students to read these because we believe in choice, and to be honest, we have time constraints. This use of whole group reading has helped our lower achieving students. Our cooperative learning groups have built a sense of community in which our students feel safe to share new ideas and to stretch themselves as learners.
Center Public School—Everything in this school focuses on instruction and curriculum for lower achieving students. There is no curriculum, few books and little attention paid to any of the talented students in this class. I do my best, but with no classroom library, few books available in the school library, little time and no training, in reality, nothing is happening for these students.
Empire School*—I used to teach in an urban school and it is so different in this school. All of my students have made progress this year. Some have moved from 50 to 70 on the DRP [Degrees of Reading Power] and none of my students are below grade level. Assessment is an ongoing tool I use daily and my reading consultant works with me. I use high level questioning skills directed at talented readers and take the time to find books that will challenge my highest readers. I also lobbied hard for the new reading program that has leveled books that spin off from the theme we are covering in the basal reader. Some of these are too easy for my talented readers, but it is a start. I have also worked with the town librarian to have more challenging books on reserve for all of my readers and that has taken a good bit of time, but it is worth it. Several of my students now go to the library regularly.
James Madison School*—I use more advanced books and supplemental novels to challenge my top readers. I use tiered instruction, compacting and more depth and complexity for these groups. I use planned enrichment experiences based on exposure, training and opportunities for in-depth self-selected work as spinouts from the regular curriculum. I also work closely with the gifted program pullout teacher to have some of my talented readers leave during language arts when they already know the content I am teaching.
North Corner School—I use the direct instruction program specified by the district. There are few opportunities and I cannot modify it for my best readers. In fact, the top readers in this group are consistently held back by the other students who read at a similar level, remember I am mixing my top third graders with the lowest achieving group of fifth graders.
Nutmeg Center Elementary School—My SFA routine remains unchanged each day and the only modification that I can make for talented readers is that I have a collection of leveled novels from which students can choose. The novels are leveled, but all students in this level read the same novel, so I have to slow down instruction quite a bit for the older students who are reading well-below grade level.
Roosevelt Public School—I am not supposed to change any of the structure of our direct instruction program, but I deviate a bit for talented readers. For example, I try to give them feedback as soon as they finish an assignment and I skip some of the direct instruction that I am giving lower readers. Every once in awhile, I try to do a game because I know my highest readers are bored.
Southside Elementary School—I try to meet each child at his or her own level and go from there. I do pick out books for my lower readers but I can't pick out books for everyone and I rarely take the time to help talented readers find books. Even though students may be reading at high levels, they may not yet be prepared to understand language and vocabulary and this inhibits reading comprehension. My goal for all my readers and especially for talented readers is the development of a larger reading vocabulary and a comfort level with big words.
Strong Porter Middle School*—I use flexible grouping patterns to enable me to have students read tiered trade books at different instructional levels based on similar themes. I vary my use of explicit instruction, omitting some from the work done by talented students, as they already know the skills, and I provide higher-level independent writing options. I also use enrichment opportunities jointly with the enrichment teacher to challenge my talented readers.

* One of the three classroom teachers identified as using differentiated content and instruction for identified talented readers.

In four of the other 10 classrooms in which instructional grouping was used, grouping patterns enabled some higher level reading students to be able to work together for part of the reading period. However, on-grade level materials were used for instruction in all of these groups. For example, in 2 classrooms in which teachers attempted to make some provisions for talented readers, grouping enabled 6 or 7 higher-level readers to work together. The materials they used were the same basal readers as the rest of the classroom used, but a separate novel was given to these higher readers. The talented readers in the group were reading at a more advanced level than others but received all of the same assignments as the rest of the group. The group also usually received the same assignment as all other students (find a section of the story that you are reading that uses imagery), but they did that assignment using a separate novel that was an extension of the basal program. For example, a third grade teacher in Empire School used the new Houghton Mifflin Series and selected trade books to provide the same assignment with students who were reading different books paralleling the same theme. This series was selected with differentiation and wide ranges of reading achievement in mind and most important to this teacher was the use of leveled trade books that can be purchased in small sets. These trade books are optional and involve an additional expense but in this district funds were provided to purchase these leveled trade books. For example, for the third grade theme of Voyagers, four levels of trade books (very easy, easy, on–level, and challenging) are available to meet a wide range of reading achievement.

In a third and seventh heterogeneous classroom in which teachers did not use any form of grouping, they attempted to teach a wide range of student reading levels. In the third grade class, the range of students encompassed approximately six grade levels, from first to sixth grade reading levels. In the seventh grade classroom, the instructional range was even wider, approximately eight grade levels, representing from fourth to twelfth grade instructional levels. In both of these classrooms, teachers tried to teach students at all instructional levels using whole group lessons and through the use of strategies such as reading response journals and questioning skills.

In 2 seventh grade classrooms in urban areas, on-grade and above-grade level readers had been homogeneously grouped together to provide higher levels of challenge, because the majority of other seventh grade students in the school were reading well below grade level. Teachers reported in interviews, however, that within these homogeneous classes, even though students were at or above grade level, major differences in interest levels as well as motivation to read resulted in multiple challenges to be able to meet the needs of all students. These teachers worked diligently to try to achieve this goal through the use of primarily whole group instruction. In one school, the principal and reading consultant in one large urban middle school with a high percentage of remedial readers made a concerted effort to provide something for above grade level readers. Of the 836 seventh grade students, 691 were reading below grade level, 110 were reading at grade level, and 35 were reading above grade level. Of these 35, 6 were identified as talented readers. All 145 students who were reading at or above grade level were given the option of engaging in additional reading instruction or skipping reading instruction all together and instead, taking pre-algebra instead of attending reading class.

Those who selected pre-algebra received no reading instruction whatsoever and those who selected reading were grouped together in an advanced class taught by an art teacher. Of the 6 talented readers, 3 selected pre-Algebra and the other 3 were scheduled into the advanced reading class with the art teacher. During several interviews after observations, the art teacher expressed frustration about trying to teach Shakespeare and poetry she had never read or studied in any depth. When asked why someone with a background in reading or language arts was not teaching the class for on grade level and advanced readers, administrators indicated that teachers with backgrounds in reading were needed for the large number of remedial seventh graders.

Classroom and School Libraries

Classroom and school libraries were available in most but not all schools (see Table 2 and 3). In 3 urban schools, libraries were virtually unused by students. In one urban school library with 11,000 volumes, a librarian/media specialist resigned in September and a replacement was sought for most of the school year while the library was unavailable for use. In another school, the principal indicated that an aide was available in the library part-time but on over 20 separate observations, no students were ever observed using the library. In another urban middle school, no checkouts of books were observed and no students were observed over multiple observations using the library for either research or browsing. The principal and reading consultant indicated that behavior problems in this large school had resulted in strict rules for library conduct and unfortunately, minimal usage.

All media specialists/librarians in each school were interviewed but only two indicated they had ever provided support for talented readers, and both said they ordered higher-level books for this population. In most other libraries, elementary students used the library intermittently across scheduled time blocks provided for their class. Middle school students rarely had the opportunity to access the library during scheduled time blocks. Several schools had well-stocked and very attractive libraries available, but problems with usage existed in many. Most elementary students could go to the library only during the block their class was scheduled, and students could check out books only during that one time of the week. Students who had previously checked out books were usually told they could not check out additional books until they had returned the one book that they had already checked out. In 2 urban elementary schools, classroom teachers reported that talented readers in their classrooms from poor families had lost books and accompanying library privileges for the entire school year because they could not afford to pay the fine for the book. On numerous visitations to the school libraries, it was noted that many library materials were available but few were appropriate for talented readers. In fact, in most elementary libraries, few advanced level books with appropriate content were available for talented third and fourth readers who read above the sixth or seventh grade level. It was also clear that many library books were never checked out. In over a 100 hours spent by our research team in the 11 school libraries, the preponderance of evidence indicated that more challenging current literature or classic books had rarely or never been checked in the last 3 years.

Extensive variation was also found in classroom libraries in both the number and quality of books available. In all but 2 classrooms, the classroom library included paperback novels that were old and minimally inviting. Numbers of books in classroom libraries ranged from 0 to 407, and the use of classroom libraries varied across sites. All but one suburban classroom had more books available in classroom libraries than did the urban classrooms. In 9 of the 12 classrooms, no students were observed using classroom library books during reading instructional blocks. In the SFA classrooms, opportunities were not provided to use classroom libraries because of the structure of the program, but teachers reported that some SFA students selected books to take home to read as they were leaving the classrooms. In one suburban community, third grade students were observed selecting reading from classroom bins during morning snack break. In one school, classroom libraries were leveled including books identified as above, on and below-grade level; students were extremely proud if they moved from below-grade to on-grade level reading in the course of a few months. Ideally, the International Reading Association (2000) suggests that classroom libraries have 7 books per student and that the school library has 20 books for each student in the school. They also recommend that one new book per student should be added to the classroom library annually and that two new books per student should be added to the school library each year. Differences were also observed in the classrooms of more and less experienced teachers as the classrooms of the newer teachers were found to include fewer books.

Resources and Materials

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in this study pertained to the availability of resources and materials that were available and could have been used to differentiate instruction and curriculum for talented readers. As noted, classroom and school libraries were of uneven quality and in several cases, limited numbers of books were available in either that could have offered challenging reading in content appropriate books. Differences were most obvious in urban classrooms in which classroom libraries had many fewer books of much lower challenge levels. However, in three urban sites, reading consultants had vast resources available of which they indicated the majority had been purchased to augment instruction for low achieving readers, but some materials were appropriate for targeted talented readers. They did not have the time or had not considered distributing these materials to classroom teachers to use with the students who were involved in this study or others in the highest reading groups. Materials and time for providing inservice or professional development on differentiation for classroom teachers were also more prevalent in suburban districts than in urban districts. One urban school administrator had taken a special interest in providing her staff with materials and support for differentiating for talented readers.

Principals' Perceptions

Every principal realized and discussed the challenges they faced in trying to help all students continue to progress in reading. Urban principals believed that they faced greater challenges than suburban principals and they cited staffing issues, material shortages, socio-economic status of families, large numbers of low scoring students,

pressure to achieve on state assessments, and continuing problems with budgetary cut-backs. All of the principals indicated that while they were concerned about the continuous progress of talented readers, current issues related to testing and assessment and basic equity issues caused them to focus the majority of their attention on students who read below grade level. Two of the urban schools in this study had been identified as being among the lowest performing schools in their state. In one district, the superintendent had threatened principals with the loss of their positions if scores did not improve, and one principal interviewed for this study was removed in the semester following data collection. Three principals had received extensive professional development in gifted and talented education and this influence seemed to contribute to the development of a wider repertoire of differentiation strategies by the teachers observed in two of these schools. For example, when asked to explain how teachers in the school addressed the needs of talented readers, one principal discussed several strategies that she encouraged staff to use. She explained:

> We have implemented cluster grouping, although I can't really talk about it very much because the other 3 principals are so completely committed to using heterogeneous grouping all of the time. But when I looked at our children and saw their wide range of ability, I knew we had to do something to make this process easier for classroom teachers. We use a grouping of five different categories: very high, high average, average, low average, and low. Our enrichment teacher worked with our teams of classroom teachers and identified students for placement in logical groups based on achievement and other issues such as learning styles. We were able to keep the range minimal. Most classes have a range of average to high or average to low and it works really well for our teachers because some are very good with high achievers and others with low achievers. We try to match the areas where teachers have talents to the areas in which students have needs, and it seems to be working.

The other principal of one of the classrooms where differentiation occurred in reading explained:

> For each child, we try to see what makes sense for his/her unique reading needs. Not every child reads in the same way or makes progress using the same strategies. We develop reading maps (with curriculum goals) and reading plans for each classroom. We provide many different strategies to try to support children who cannot read to learn in traditional ways. We also work hard to model reading throughout the day. Many of these children do not have models for reading regularly at home and so we must provide that role modeling opportunity for these students as well.

The third principal who had received extensive training in differentiation was responsible for the middle school in which seventh grade students were grouped together and could choose either math or advanced reading with the art teacher. While she was frustrated with the progress made to date, she believed that she had at least tried to do the right thing with minimal help, staffing, or materials.

Classroom Teachers' Perceptions

All classroom teachers said that they were concerned about the continued development and progress of their talented readers, but each expressed a sense of frustration about their lack of knowledge, time, resources, administrative support, district priorities, and knowledge about how to use innovation and provide continuous progress for talented readers. The teachers also acknowledged an increasing emphasis on raising the achievement of low-performing readers because of state and local testing programs and the assessment of both students and teachers. Some teachers discussed ideas they had about what could be done to challenge talented readers but indicated that they did not have the time or the resources to accomplish this goal. In some of the interviews, teachers made confusing statements that may have indicated their ambivalence about this task. For example, one middle school teacher reported that she held higher expectations for talented readers based on their ability, but that she assessed her students using the same criteria for everyone. She also discussed her mission to provide challenging reading material for all students, while indicating that she rarely tries to challenge her most talented readers. In this class, 4 students were identified as talented readers and each scored at the 99% on standardized achievement tests in reading. In addition, each had been identified for the gifted program and excelled in reading in elementary school. Each was an avid reader and displayed most of the characteristics of talented readers discussed earlier. Their teacher indicated that she provided multiple venues for challenge for talented readers but that it was always done in whole group settings. Indeed, the summary line written after 11 observations of 4 very talented students in this classroom was: "Instruction was characterized by whole group teaching and activities and no variation was found in content, products, or pace for the 4 talented readers."

In addition to the book used in class, each student had to select a reading book to read for 20 minutes at home each night. Their daily journal entries are written on the previous night's reading, and the teacher reported that she generally approved the reading selections to make sure they are appropriately challenging, but readily acknowledged that she is much more concerned about middle and low ability readers' selections and trusted the higher end readers' judgment when choosing appropriate books. When the 4 talented readers' journals were reviewed, however, their reading selection was found to be unchallenging. One student chose an historical fiction journal with female main characters entries that appeared to be well below her reading level, another read very simple mysteries, the third chose novels based on the *Star Wars* movies, and the fourth selected a humorous comedy book that was also well below grade level. These talented readers all read unchallenging books about which they wrote for 10 minutes each day with no guidance or suggestions for alternative reading from their teacher.

Positive findings also emerged with classroom teachers. For example, one of the three teachers provided differentiation on a fairly regular basis and was extremely proud of her work with the town librarian to identify advanced books to challenge talented readers that enhanced the themes in the literary anthology that she was using in the class. One of the teachers using the SFA program purchased books with her own funds to entice some of the students to read more often at home. In the 2 middle schools where teachers

had developed a class for on-and above-grade level readers, the teachers were proud of what they had accomplished with the support of the principal and administrative team, and they believed that these options provided talented readers with multiple opportunities for both enrichment and acceleration in the classrooms observed.

In one suburban third grade classroom that provided the most diverse opportunities for talented readers, the 2 talented readers selected books from an in-class library bin. The books with green circles on their spines were higher level sections that had been brought into the classroom to challenge them. Talented readers were grouped together for instruction, and curriculum compacting was used in this classroom in James Madison School. A compacted version of the basal reader provided talented students with the ability to master basic skills and provide interaction with the literature in the program. A talent pool of approximately 6% of students is provided with pull-out services in which they work with an enrichment specialist for approximately 2-3 hours each week. The third grade teacher explained that she tries to push students beyond the regular curriculum to a level that is appropriate for their ability level so they can delve more deeply into the story. The third grade teacher also explained that she encourages her advanced readers to consider the author's intent and issues related to depth and complexity, and encourages them with her questioning skills to move beyond what they have previously achieved. The teacher explained that she believes that the more advanced books and supplemental class sets and the use of grouping in the classroom enabled her to challenge her most talented readers now, but that this process took her 3 years to develop. She also explained that she uses many different strategies and tiers, and as a base, provides enrichment to all students, but provides differentiated enrichment opportunities for talented students. She provided several examples that had been observed during classroom observations.

In the third grade, urban classroom described earlier, a very different scenario existed. No in-class library was provided where students could select challenging books as no books of appropriate levels of challenge for these students were noted in the classroom. The major accommodation used was that talented readers were grouped together for instruction according to their teacher, and a compacted version of the basal reader was used to have students master basic skills. However, over many different observations, no use of the basal program was observed and no reading skills or instruction was provided; rather, students were reading novels that seemed to be too easy for them. Talented readers in this urban school rarely have any formal reading instruction because they read well above grade level. Instead of having more challenging books assigned to them or have an opportunity for book chats or literature circles with their classroom teacher, they spend time on their own.

Reading Consultants' Perceptions

Every reading consultant echoed the concerns of classroom teachers, expressing concern about the continuous progress of talented readers. They each articulated a sense of frustration about their lack of knowledge, time, and resources for this population. Four of the reading consultants also expressed anger over a change in emphasis on increasing

the achievement of the lowest performing readers in the state and district. One reading consultant from an urban district who was being interviewed for the fourth time summarized her feelings in the following way.

> I feel so frustrated and guilty that I can not do more for our talented readers. In the 20 years since I have worked in this district, I have seen countless kids in second grade who read on the fifth grade level and when they leave fifth grade, they are still reading on the fifth grade level. We owe them better reading instruction than they receive. We do have talented readers in this school and they need much more than we provide to progress in reading.

One representative summary of a reading consultant's perceptions in an urban school illustrates the challenges faced and articulated by several others.

Karen, the reading consultant, has been in the school for a number of years and is widely considered to be knowledgeable and efficient. She explained how hard teachers have had to work and discussed the fact that teachers were implementing new programs in reading, language arts, spelling, and science during the previous 2 years. She described the writing program as wholistic, and explained that many of the first graders who were transitional met the state goal by the time they reached the fourth grade. She explained that they used many different programs to reach students and help them to achieve the high state standards in writing. She explained the reading program in great depth over three different hour-long interviews. Her knowledge of assessment was broad and she used multiple charts to explain reading levels, writing rubrics, and the performances of all students. She explained the remedial program as including multiple opportunities for students to gain skills in many different ways, from after school activities 2 days a week in which between 20 and 35 kids in third grade have snacks and do reading activities in an after school program developed to help them prepare for the stringent state mastery test. After the test was given in fourth grade, 20 of 40 students in fourth grade attend a fourth grade after school program to help them continue to improve in reading and writing.

She acknowledged that efforts for talented readers are "sparse" but indicated that guided reading was used in classrooms and that she encouraged teachers to use curriculum compacting to eliminate work students had already mastered. After compacting, she hoped that students would be given the opportunity to pursue reading in an area of their own choice. The freedom and flexibility, to go above and beyond, she explained, is provided for all above grade level students but she acknowledged, as this school is one of the lowest scoring schools in the state, that her attention was focused on students not reading at grade level. She considers herself to be the procurer and guide, and is adept at diagnosing reading problems and works as a coach to help teachers to develop more skills in teaching reading. Every January and June each teacher tests every student to check progress, and she knew the recent DRP scores of every child in the classroom in which we were observing.

Early literacy and peer coaching with teachers and regional educational service center representatives helps teachers to improve their skills. In addition to the position of Instructional Reading Consultant she holds, the school has two full-time reading consultants and a full-time reading instructional assistant. They frequently break classrooms into groups, and reading teachers meet regularly to discuss student progress. They discuss switching groups to make reading groupings more appropriate and have leveled all of the guided reading books to make clear the challenge that can be available for students and they believe they are on the way to better instruction and higher scores. They also use summer school to increase reading abilities of their low students. Students who are below mastery must attend summer school and they also provide parent programs and a parent resource center. The use of "continuous assessment" she explained, has helped the teachers to understand that many students read at low levels. They use assessment now throughout the year and their goal is to have students become fully independent readers. The district has set stricter levels for each grade level and provided funds so that students who do not meet grade level goal go to summer school. She explained that classroom libraries in each classroom are necessary because the instructional range is so wide in any one-grade level. Because this school has low state mastery scores, state funding sources and the district office has provided additional resources. The availability of books to stimulate low readers is not a problem and neither is class size, she explained. With the assistance from the district central office and the support of the principal, the maximum class size has been reduced to 18-20. However, as noted consistently throughout multiple interviews, she acknowledges with regret that her focus, and the focus of her teachers, is on children who are reading well below grade level.

Summary

Reading instruction in these classes generally included a combination of the use of basal readers with some trade books; limited reading strategy instruction was observed in any classroom. In 3 classrooms, regular curriculum reading practices were enriched and modified for talented readers some of the time with the use of a combination of strategies listed in Table 2. In the other classrooms, no evidence was found of the use of any differentiated instruction during any observations for talented readers. Multiple resources were available and differentiation strategies were familiar to some classroom teachers, but few were used on any regular basis to meet the needs of talented readers in their classrooms. For example, instructional grouping was used in several classrooms, but was employed without differentiation of content or choice, resulting in little meaningful change or challenge for talented readers. In other words, if talented readers were grouped together but looked for web sites of their favorite rock stars or read unchallenging books during that time, they were seldom challenged as readers.

Discussion

Most of the talented students observed in this study spent a great deal of time in school engaged in reading activities and skills they had already mastered and few

appeared to have systematic opportunities to continue to progress in reading. While some had access to advanced resources, even the availability of advanced resources in classrooms and some choice of reading materials in school and classroom libraries did not guarantee that talented readers interacted with materials that were either at or slightly above their current level of reading. Differentiation of reading instruction for talented readers was limited and even when teachers had some knowledge about strategies that could be used to differentiate instruction and curriculum, most had difficulty in translating this knowledge into effective classroom teaching strategies or the use of a variety of instructional strategies based on differentiation practices. If these practices are to be successful, professional development should be provided to classroom teachers, and coaching and support must be available from district personnel. It is important to note that this type of targeted professional development addresses a variety of strategies that can be used by classroom teachers to benefit students of all achievement levels. Classroom teachers should be able to understand how to implement a reasonable number of differentiated reading strategies within various classroom organizational patterns. Teachers can be provided with opportunities to learn how to identify students' interests, target books that will challenge students' current reading levels, integrate the use of technology into classroom reading activities, and provide multiple opportunities for creative modes of expression. Teachers have learned to use assessment effectively to identify students' strengths and compact their curriculum (Reis et al., 1995) and use classroom organization and management strategies to insure that all students continue to progress in reading. Talented readers should have opportunities to work together and to engage in critical reading and analysis, advanced vocabulary development, challenges such as comparing themes across fiction and non-fiction, and consistent exposure to advanced reading opportunities. The use of readily available materials such as Great Books or strategies such as Literature Circles can help to make these opportunities easier to implement. Indeed, in three classrooms observed in this study, some differentiation occurred regularly. Two of these classrooms were in schools in which principals actively supported the use of differentiation and in which professional development in these strategies had been made available to teachers.

Each classroom teacher discussed the pressure he/she felt that district and state administrators applied to "bring up the scores" of the lowest reading students and perceived that this resulted in lost opportunities for middle range and high achieving readers. Most teachers believed that this pressure had resulted in the use of less creative and innovative methods that teachers were led to believe would help to improve the scores. As teachers continued to experience pressure to improve test scores, fewer opportunities for creative challenges in reading may be provided to all students and continuous progress in reading may result in fewer talented readers. These pressures were more obvious in urban districts serving large numbers of low achieving readers.

Talented readers in most classrooms in this study used the same basal reading programs as all other students and many are unchallenged in school reading programs. With some time and effort, classroom teachers could learn how to provide options to challenge these students. For example, a group of students that has already mastered basic skills in spelling or writing can have their curriculum compacted and use alternative

challenging materials in reading based on their interests. They can meet together for a block of time on a daily basis (Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Rogers, 1991) and be assigned appropriately challenging substitute books that offer depth and complexity (Kaplan, 2001) and are based on similar themes as books being read by readers at or below grade level to facilitate the opportunity for whole class discussion of similar themes across books. In the classroom in which talented readers surfed the web for rock stars, this type of opportunity could have easily been assigned. The books were available in the school. Talented readers could also be given opportunities to complete different creative products and participate in alternative writing assignments. Teachers can spend some time with them on a daily basis, checking to make sure their reading time in class is spent with appropriately challenging material and assignments, and organizing discussion groups. Independent studies of sufficient depth and challenge can be used to encourage students to work in areas of personal interest and challenge. They could be given the opportunity to bring prior knowledge and insight into their interpretations of challenging text. They can use technology to access web sites of authors, to read challenging books on line, and to interact with talented readers from other schools using literature circle discussion strategies. Technology can also be used to access advanced content, to create concept maps and other technological products, to write and revise stories, chapters, and even books. Minimally, talented students would benefit from diagnostically based instruction to ensure a consistent improvement in their reading skills.

It is possible to differentiate reading instruction for talented readers without using a different reading program to provide high levels of challenge for all students. Classroom teachers can challenge talented readers with higher-level questioning that extend the depth of students' contact with good literature. Rich, complex reading provides the possibility of multiple interpretations of literature that can challenge students at all levels. Talented readers, who are often accustomed to giving the "right" answer, can benefit from considering more than one interpretation of a text. Having multiple interpretations encourages students to examine how they develop their own beliefs and provide challenges that talented readers rarely encounter in their classrooms.

Limited research exists on classroom reading practices used with talented readers. Interviews with teachers in this study showed that they knew they should be doing more for their talented readers, but all believed that they had "a moral obligation" to focus most effort and time on students who were reading below grade level. In fact, in this research, many talented readers received little instruction beyond access to more reading material that was not necessarily advanced or appropriate for them. This study provided some insights about the experiences of some talented readers in 12 diverse elementary and middle school classrooms who did not receive appropriately challenging instruction in reading.

Underachievement may occur when talented students do not receive appropriate levels of challenge and other research that indicates achievement gains when easier materials are replaced with more advanced material. Too little research exists on talented readers who do not receive the opportunity to interact regularly with challenging text and it is our hope that this article will stimulate more research on a variety of questions, for

example, on the use of challenging vs. "comfort" reading materials with talented readers. Most teachers in this study told us that they understood that they were not providing very challenging reading instruction for their talented readers, but they thought that these readers would benefit, or at the very least, not be negatively affected, by spending considerable time with reading materials that they can handle with ease. Other research indicates that this is not the case, at least for some talented students (Reis et al., 1995).

Many educators agree that the lack of academic rigor for talented students is a serious national concern (O'Connell Ross, 1993). Given the limited data available on the classroom practices for talented readers, additional research is needed on current classroom practices for this population. In this study, a few classroom teachers provided challenge and some differentiation for these readers, but the majority did not differentiate or extend reading instruction for talented readers. The question raised by a third grade teacher was echoed in discussions with many others. "What choice do I have," he asked. With this kind of a spread, he believed his moral obligation is to spend more time with students who read well below grade level. But another moral obligation certainly exists to provide rich learning opportunities to challenge all students. Without specialized reading instruction that meets their needs, talented readers may regress toward the mean rather than continue to develop their reading skills (Brown & Rogan, 1983). Perhaps some talented reading students are not hurt by reading material that is consistently easy for them, but this practice may obstruct continuous progress in reading, and most certainly denies these children with opportunities to interact with appropriately complex texts that could be both challenging and joyful. It is hoped that this research will serve as a catalyst for future research in an area that has been largely ignored.

Organization of the Monograph

Chapter 1 presented an analysis of reading instruction of talented readers. The literature base, qualitative methodology, and findings were discussed. Each of the case studies from 11 different schools is presented in the separate chapters that follow. At the end of each case study is a brief summary.

CHAPTER 2: Betsy Ross Middle School

Jocelyn M. Dunnack
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**5-8**
Student Population	**649**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**7%**
Black	**4%**
Hispanic	**3%**
White	**86%**
Non-English Home Language	**6%**
English Language Learners	**2%**
Free and Reduced Lunch:	**15%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Reading scores on the statewide assessment and Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) for this district are consistently high. On the norm-referenced SAT, the district trend is an increase in group stanine scores over time so that by seventh grade, students score at the top of the standardized population. For example, since 1990, seventh grade students have scored in the top 7% of the population or higher; and from 1997 to the present, they have scored in the top 1% of the population.

When the seventh grade class observed for this study was in third grade, they scored at the 89th percentile in Total Reading portion of the SAT, which was higher than the year before (70th percentile) and the year after (68th percentile). When they took the test again in fifth grade, they scored at the 98th percentile. The target class's Comprehension and Vocabulary subtest scores rose from the 90th percentile in third grade to the 99th percentile in fifth grade, improving upon their already high results.

On the criterion referenced statewide assessment, the majority of students consistently achieve at Excellence levels, which is the State goal. The reading portion of the statewide assessment includes the Degrees of Reading Power test and reading comprehension. In 1999, when the target class was in sixth grade, only 5% of students in that class scored at the intervention level in reading. This is the lowest remedial percentage in the school since the statewide tests were implemented. That same year, 88% of these sixth graders scored at the Excellence level.

Betsy Ross Middle School has also decreased the percentage of students needing remedial writing instruction. In 1993, 28% of sixth graders in Betsy Ross needed remedial instruction, and in 1999 only 1% did. The largest decrease in class scores occurred between 1995 and 1996. In 1995, 20% of sixth grade students scored at the remedial level in writing, but by 1996, that number had dropped to 7% of sixth grade students.

Introduction to Betsy Ross Middle School

Originally built in 1969 and recently renovated, Betsy Ross Middle School is truly a modern and state-of-the-art educational facility. The building is airy, bright, and

clean, with students clearly being the school's focus. Besides showcases and bulletin boards promoting school achievements, activities, and programs, student murals brighten every stretch of available wall. Students, teachers, and administrators interact cheerfully. Facilities include instrumental and vocal music rooms, a full auditorium, equipment and rooms for instructional technology and family and consumer science, two computer labs, several computers in every classroom, a technologically equipped library media center, science labs, a gymnasium, and athletic fields. The school's two immediate goals are to improve their integration of technology and to differentiate instruction to meet diverse needs in heterogeneous classrooms. Both of these goals are supported through full time professional staff and graduate interns from the local university.

Betsy Ross Middle School is located in a rural town and the school is in the middle of the community. Several winding back roads lead to the school and the nearest neighbors are family homes and a town park. The school is 5 minutes from the state university, which employs many of the parents, contributing to the school's ethnic, cultural, and intellectual diversity. The town is known for dedicated parents and their interest in quality public education.

The underlying philosophy of all school programs is that "education should provide for the maximum development of each student." The school's mission statement commits to both mastery of basic skills and higher-level thinking and learning. Assessment strategies consider learning styles to paint the most accurate representation of what students know. The school encourages decision-making in a variety of contexts and provides consequences for student decisions, both good and bad. There are countless opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning and their actions, both within classrooms and through after school and flexible time activities. The middle school faculty also develops community by emphasizing respect, cooperation, concern for others, and communication. Time is scheduled weekly for affective topics and goals. This time builds ties between teachers and students and addresses the diverse social and emotional needs of middle school students.

Many teachers, parents, and visitors summarize the school in one statement: "There is a lot going on." Students have regular opportunities to participate in special programs or clubs in academic areas, the arts, culture, athletics, and technology. The Middle School faculty believes that if students want to pursue an activity, they will try to create opportunities and space so that all students can develop interests and talents.

Betsy Ross Middle School encourages visitors. A tradition for American Education Week is to invite parents to visit their children in classes. School staff meet parents with refreshments in the morning, and they are free to observe all school activities. The parents' association and the town's Department of Parks and Recreation join student organizations in offering social activities both after school and in the evening.

School Administration

Betsy Ross Middle School is led by a principal, ES, and a vice principal, GB. They have been working together for 9 years. GB spends most of his time with students and their issues. ES is clearly proud of her staff and students, and is impressed with all that happens at her school, echoing may of the same comments offered by the parents and visitors and described earlier. She has full confidence in teachers' and students' talents and beams as she describes the teachers' commitment to the school, to learning, and to improving their instruction. As a community member, as well as a very prominent figure in public education, she is very aware of each of her constituencies' beliefs and the politics that interact between various groups. She has contact with administrators, teachers, parents, and students in both formal and informal settings, and tries to address each constituency's concerns adequately, while understanding that no one can be completely satisfied. ES appears to be very warm and supportive. She frequently pulls teachers aside between classes or during breaks to chat about a concern or to offer reassurance. She smiles often and works hard to put people at ease.

The school's reading program is undergoing many changes as grades one through six pilot a basal program that will become the new backbone of a program that has traditionally followed a strong Whole Language philosophy. It is uncertain how that long-standing philosophy will be affected by the new curriculum. This process poses new challenges for ES as the teachers, students, and parents adjust to new materials and changing emphases.

Reading Consultants

Several years ago, the district administration hired 2 reading consultants who oversee and coordinate the various aspects of the reading program. They make sure the curriculum addresses state and district standards; help teachers select and utilize reading materials; organize professional development in reading; maintain databases of scores and other assessment information; and supervise the early reading intervention program. The consultants do not teach, unless they are asked to present a model lesson. They divide their time between the 4 schools in the district, meeting with different teachers or teams. They provide advice on using texts, developing reading skills, and improving critical analysis.

One of the consultants, JS, explained the progression of reading instruction from kindergarten to eighth grade. Beginning in the primary grades, the focus of instruction is on developmental reading: reading skills, reading strategies, fluency, proficiency, and comprehension. Because of the statewide assessment's emphasis on asking students to support their opinions and arguments with evidence from their reading, the consultants are working with teachers to improve students' abilities to draw upon the text to make informed critiques. JS has observed many students struggling with this higher-order reading skill thus far.

The reading consultants believe that, as students mature, instruction should steer them toward independent reading. By seventh grade, they hope that reading is essentially independent. The elementary grades are characterized by homogeneous grouping for reading, but middle school teachers sometimes arrange their heterogeneous classrooms into flexible instructional groups for reading. Seventh grade literature selections and instruction focus less on reading skills and more on the layers of meaning and understanding within the literature. Teachers encourage reader response and active reading. They regard these skills as the tools of comprehension for interpretation, rather than comprehension for summary. Since students are grouped heterogeneously, this also means less differentiation may occur in literature selections. This grouping strategy raises the concern that some students are not reading at their instructional reading level. Following the philosophy of many teachers at Betsy Ross Middle School, the seventh grade literature teachers believe they teach to the top and employ strategies to scaffold the middle and bottom to approach that level. Literature is selected at a high reading level and various written responses and cooperative learning strategies help students to respond to the literature. For example, *Canterbury Tales* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* are on the Seventh Grade Reserve Reading List, but students are not encouraged to read these and few books on the reserve list are used due to time constraints. The teachers defend their practice because the entire class shares the challenging text, thus enabling students to model good reading skills and active reading. They are particularly proud of one special education student who made a thirty point gain on his statewide assessment scores between sixth and eighth grade. The teachers are pleased with how the cooperative groups build a sense of community in which students feel safe to share new ideas and to publicly stretch themselves as learners. They find that the students learn quite a bit about literature through the variety of response formats.

School Library and the Library/Media Specialist

The library is a beautiful, recent addition to the school. It is located between the primary student entrance to the school and the main office. It has high ceilings and large windows, giving it an airy and open feeling. The usual workspaces one expects in a library, partitioned desks and large rectangular tables, are present, as well as an area with cushioned chairs and couches. This area includes current periodicals and newspapers, as well as a display of new books. The library also maintains 3 display cases. One has a multicultural theme; others advertise special reading events. For example, the school is an active participant in Read Across America, a program that encourages students to keep track of how much time they spend reading. This year, homerooms earned points for their minutes spent reading to purchase books for local charities. The library display case advertised this program.

The library includes a classroom that many teachers utilize when conducting whole-class library lessons. The classroom includes an instructional computer, a dry erase board, almanacs, encyclopedias, and round tables with chairs. During the 1999-2000 school year, 360 classes met in the library. Teachers reserve either the classroom or the whole library for student research. The library staff also supplies teachers with

books, generally enrichment literature or nonfiction sources for research. During 1999-2000, teachers made 42 requests for materials.

The library contains over 14,000 books, periodicals, newspapers, and pamphlets in its print collection. Resources also include videos, audiotapes, filmstrips, slides, and kits. A bank of computers provides access to the online catalog, other libraries' online catalogs, electronic encyclopedias, and the Internet. The library also participates in inter-library loan, filling 150 requests from students and teachers last year.

LR is the only librarian in the district, and formerly the school's audio/visual coordinator. She spends most of her time at the Middle School and works very closely with the school's technology specialist. There are two full-time staff and a half-time graduate assistant from the local university who work in the library. They are responsible for the daily library management, assisting teachers and students with utilizing the library's resources, and promoting reading. They are joined with a liaison from the town library, and her job is to integrate and promote resources with the public schools. The library staff is very active and visible, LR dresses up as the Grinch and travels to homerooms during Read Across America, an unforgettable reminder to read.

LR has worked to build the library's young adult collection to have appropriate books for talented readers. She explained in an interview that she has not been able to provide as many enrichment opportunities as she would like. She hopes that with the recent removal of her audio/visual responsibilities, she will have time to form a book club for talented readers.

Students can choose to use the library as their activity for the mid-day flexible time block. Students may also stay after school to use the library. Through mid-April, 207 students had used the library after school. Most students sign up to read, work on homework, or to conduct research for projects. During the 2000-2001 school year, 4,723 books were checked out of the Middle School library. This is much smaller than the totals for each of the 4 elementary schools. This may be due to the fact that the elementary schools have weekly library visits for each class. Since it is less convenient for a middle school student to check out library books than it is for elementary school students, the circulation at the Middle School may be lower.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The district is involved in a pilot of a new basal literature series for K-6 classrooms, and it is not yet certain how this will affect the reading program. The series was chosen to bring a sharper focus onto reading skills instruction. Previously, teachers used a variety of genres and texts to teach reading. The overarching goals of the reading program were to develop independent reading skills, comprehension, and the desire to read for pleasure. These whole language-based goals were established with the understanding that phonemic awareness, phonics, and word analysis were the essential skills in students' abilities to decode and comprehend texts. Strategies for developing

these skills were not as explicit before the basal as they are with the multitude of resources provided in the new series. The teachers will be looking for ways to integrate the books and resources they had previously used into the new program.

Presently, instructional resources and the library provide teachers with choices from fiction, non-fiction, short stories, and poetry. There are also multiple books within a theme or genre available, which allow teachers the option of delving deeper into a unit of study. For example, the sixth grade reads *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, about Depression-era sharecroppers. Students also choose an additional book to extend their study of racial prejudice and discrimination. The choices depended upon their reading ability. High-end readers were offered a choice of one of *Roll of Thunder*'s sequels; lower end readers were offered the Civil Rights Movement era story, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*.

Currently, teachers have much autonomy in shaping their reading program from the available resources. Because of the team structure of the middle school, most teachers who share subjects collaborate closely on their instruction. Sixth grade reading teachers plan their units together, and will occasionally reassign students to different teachers for a unit based on ability or interest. Seventh grade literature teachers coordinate literature selections and activities, and use the same timeline. They find it is easier for them and the students if they begin books at the same time and administer tests on the same day.

Seventh and eighth grade teachers integrate their reading choices with other content areas. In seventh grade, literature selections correspond primarily with social studies units. When the students studied Greece and Rome, they read *Ulysses* by Bernard Evslin, which was based on Homer's *Odyssey*. Eighth grade students study Content Reading, which emphasizes reading skills for content areas, and the selections integrate with math and science. During a study of diseases, students read *The Hot Zone* by Richard Preston. Another novel, *Flatland,* by Edwin A. Abbott, is a story about living in a two-dimensional world that supplements geometry classes.

Through Reserve Reading lists for each grade level and the available guidance of the reading consultants, teachers, and students have a variety of texts available for instruction, read alouds, and personal reading. Most grades require that students read for homework, usually by setting a time goal. Some teachers enable students to fulfill this assignment with books they are reading for another class or project; others want them to have a book, generally novels, exclusively for that assignment. The goal is for students to have additional practice reading independently, to make reading a habit, and to promote reading for enjoyment.

Instructional assistants work in either clerical or special education roles. Clerical instructional assistants are not involved with instruction. Special education instructional assistants are either one-on-one aides or they provide in-class support for special education students. In the observed classrooms, only one class had a special education instructional assistant. The teacher described this class as having a "high concentration

of special education students." The aide sat with 2 students, for whom she modified writing assignments and rephrased teacher questions and students' comments as needed. Another student assigned to her sat separately from that group, and she kept him on task and checked his work.

Seventh Grade Reading and Language Arts Regular Classroom

Seventh grade literature classes follow the same outline for most classes. Students begin with 10 minutes of journal writing in response to their reading the night before in a book of their choice. Then, students read from the book the class is studying. This is done as a whole group read aloud, with students assigned to read sections. Then, there is some form of response. The teachers have created packets to correspond with the books where students take notes from the reading or complete skill activities. Other times, whole class or small group discussions follow reading.

Journal Writing

As soon as students come in, they take out their journals and follow the established structure to reflect on their reading from the night before. In this particular classroom, the desks are arranged in groups of five. There is a round wooden table in the center of the room, surrounded by the clusters of desks. Folders, color-coded for each section of literature this teacher leads, are stacked on the table with the corresponding students' journals. A basket containing a classroom set of the book they are currently reading is also on this table.

Students gather their folders and journals from the table. As there is no passing time between classes, some students arrive later than others do, either because they came from the other side of the school or they just took their time getting to class. Journal writing lasts for approximately 10 minutes. The teacher times this activity from when most students have arrived and started to work. Those who come first and get right to work have more time to write. This particular class is a long block of 100 minutes. Short blocks are 50 minutes.

In addition to the book used in class, each student has selected a reading book. Their homework is to read that book for 20 minutes each night. Their daily journal entries are about the previous night's reading. The teachers generally approve the reading selections to make sure they are appropriately challenging, but they seemed more concerned about middle and low ability readers' selections and seemed to trust the higher end readers' judgment when choosing appropriate books. Of the 4 identified talented readers, 3 journals were reviewed. One student primarily chose historical fiction with female main characters, another read mostly mysteries, and the third chose novels based on the *Star Wars* movies. The students are not allowed to choose books with predictable plots, such as Stephen King's horror, and the teachers prefer that they avoid nonfiction because they use the journal entries to develop interpretation skills that readers do not necessarily use when stories are predictable or factual. Students can use books from the

classroom library, although the teacher laments that her selection is very limited, and recently ordered 90 new books. In the meantime, she encourages them to use the school and town libraries.

The classroom library is a wire book holder on wheels. Rather than books lined on shelves, it has many compartments on each level that are the width of a paperback book, and are easy to flip through when looking for the right book. It currently holds 342 books. The compartments are arranged by author, genre, or theme. The books are mostly novels with high-interest topics, and are most appropriate for sixth through eighth graders. A variety of novels by Jerry Spinelli, S. E. Hinton, and Avi are available. One of the more challenging books is *Lord of the Flies*. One section includes historical fiction about the American Revolution, and those selections vary in difficulty. Most students seem to use books they find outside of the classroom.

Assessing Journals

The journal rubrics are readily available on posters hanging on the back wall so everyone knows what the teachers expect. All students are expected and encouraged to work towards the highest level. An entry that retells the plot with no critical thinking, or that predicts what will happen next with supporting evidence, receives a check minus. An entry that compares the book with the student's life or another book's characters, setting, conflict, or style receives a check. An entry that discusses the book's theme or the author's message and relates these things to the world or the student's self receives a check plus. On the side wall, the teacher hung a poster listing common themes in literature, for example: loss, freedom, and friendship. The rubrics actually present a progression in complexity over the year, and the students add to their entries over time. They started identifying the author's message in February; while previously, they had concentrated on theme. They are expected to include all components in their entries; the best ones retell the plot that was read the night before, maybe make a prediction or comparison, identify a theme, and relate that to the world by asking a "Big Question," the author's message.

Ten minutes have passed, and the teacher tells the students to finish their entries. She moves from her desk on the side of the classroom to the table at the front where she keeps her instructional supplies. She picks up a stack of index cards, one for each student, listing the dates they have shared journal entries or critiqued a classmate's entry. Students are chosen for two roles: one to share his or her journal entry, another to critique the entry based on the journal rubrics. Even though they know she only picks students who have not shared or critiqued recently, students ask to be chosen, and many of them point out how long it has been since they last shared: "C'mon, I haven't shared in, like, 5 years!" Students who share their entry receive an automatic check plus for the day because they subjected their work to public evaluation, and both students who speak are rewarded with a piece of candy. The teacher finally selects her "lucky victims," and the student begins reading her entry.

Some days, the student has related the theme to the world and generated a "Big Question" that is critical and important, while anchoring everything in the text. Those entries require very little discussion and go quickly. This day, the student had read a book about a person who was serving a jail sentence for a crime he had not committed. She discussed the character's loss of freedom. She identified the theme as loss, and her "Big Question" was "Why do people need their freedom?" One of the identified talented readers was chosen to critique. He remarked, "I think the question is specific to the book." The teacher proposed that perhaps a broader "Big Question" would be "Is our justice system fair?" Another identified talented reader could not accept that and said, "But that doesn't relate to the theme of loss!" Still another talented reader proposed, "Is it possible to lose your freedom inside of yourself?" This seemed to confuse most people, and the student who had started the critique sarcastically said, "Whoa! That's really heavy!" This student flashed him an indignant look and told him, "Shut up!" She explained that she was thinking of losing one's sense of self. She saw that as losing one's freedom to be one's self and therefore, freedom would be lost inside the self. The teacher remarked that her question was not related to the book's theme of unfair incarceration, and she responded that unfair incarceration could not be the theme because it was specific to the book's plot. She argued that her question went beyond the book. The discussion ended after that comment, with no resolution, because most of the class had begun side conversations.

The talented readers dominated that particular conversation. Besides one other student, whose comment was intended to elicit a laugh from his friends, the 4 identified students were the only ones who spoke. This is an example of a situation where the teachers want the talented readers to model their thinking for the other students by engaging in a dialogue and developing their ideas as they speak. The teacher moderated the discussion and modeled her thinking for the talented readers. However, it is unclear how well other students were able to follow the conversation's progression. It happened quickly, and many students, like the one mentioned above and his friends, did not appear to be fully attending to the development of ideas as each student brought a new perspective. The talented readers' thinking processes were not explicit to those who did not understand the points being made or how those students were thinking. The debate ended because the rest of the class had turned to other conversations and it did not come to a consensus or conclusion.

Journal sharing is supposed to last only about 5 minutes, and the teacher feels obligated to move the class into the whole group lesson quickly, and unfortunately, must sacrifice some of the interesting conversations the students create. Sharing always ends with the critiquing student recommending a grade for the journal entry. He did and the students returned their journals to the round table and took one of the books for the shared classroom reading.

In-class Reading

Literature selections in this class are read aloud. Often, they take the form of readers' theater, with students reading the parts of different characters and narrators

reading the rest. All students not reading are expected to follow along in their books. This format helps the students develop expressive reading, which also aids the comprehension of the students listening to them read. It is very difficult to follow a story that is read monotonously. The teacher has a supply of props to utilize with appropriate stories. Since the class reads Greek, Roman, and medieval selections, she has a sword for the heroes. She also has some simple capes and hats that the students enjoy using, although the sword is the favorite.

Sometimes, the teacher alone will read. She does this especially if they are pressed for time or when she wants to build a mood in the classroom. Since the student readers have not looked at the text beforehand, they cannot read ahead to see where the story is going and cannot truly build a mood with their tone and expression. The talented readers exhibited the best expression, but there is room for improvement, and the teacher is their model. Also, some of the students seemed a little more concerned with how the sword might be used to act out the story than with keeping up with their part in the reading. This deterred from their ability to expressively convey what the characters said. The teacher will read if she wants to build suspense, generally around the climax of the story. She said she sometimes has the students shut their books when they are at a really good part so they will not read ahead.

During this particular reading, the end of *Ulysses*, several students were reading. All students volunteer to read, and the teacher tries to pick an appropriate part for each student's reading ability. One of the talented readers portrays Ulysses; another student who is of average ability, but has ADHD, reads the next largest part. It is a bit challenging for him, but it is very active and he follows the reading closely, reminding others when they miss a line. They switch parts every 5 pages, allowing more students to be involved.

Most students do follow along. Four out of the 20 students present were visibly looking away from their books or resting their heads on their desks during the reading. The teacher knows which students tend to talk, and to whom, and she has taken some precautions. She assigned those students to sit in different groups, but they still manage to communicate across the room. She makes sure that one of those students is assigned to read, and that does increase his/her engagement.

During reading, the teacher stops to ask questions. These questions check comprehension, prompt students to make predictions, or interpret the meaning behind an event. When Ulysses plans to return home, he does not explicitly say what he is doing. She asked, "What is Ulysses doing tomorrow?" and the students recognized that he was going to sneak home and reclaim his household. This question was textual, but required interpretation. When Ulysses came upon his dog, the dog died. She asked, "Why did the dog die?" and the students posed the explanation that the dog waited for Ulysses to come home safely. Before the final battle scene, the teacher took over reading. She did not ask many questions while she herself read. Once the story finished, they shared reactions to the ending and considered the question, "Was Ulysses a hero?" This required students to

draw upon the definition of hero they had been using during the unit and to cite examples from the text.

One of the identified talented readers shared her reactions to the end of the story. She predicted, based on Ulysses' prior experiences, that his trials and tribulations were not over. She was the only one with comments on the ending that drew upon the story; the rest expressed like or dislike with the turn of events. Another talented reader remembered many details from the text, which he used to defend statements made by other students. He did not draw any conclusions of his own.

Post-reading Activities

After this, the class worked with their groups to attempt to find an answer to the question, "Was Ulysses a hero?" Of the five groups, one group was special education students working with an aide, and the rest were lead by one of the talented readers. Three of these groups had a female student who was identified as a talented reader. One group had two, a male and a female. The talented girls assumed leadership. They organized the discussion, dominated the conversation, and spoke for the group when they shared with the whole class. When the sharing turned into a whole class debate, the 4 girls who had assumed the group leadership roles spoke equally as often as the remaining 16 students in the class.

The students are grouped heterogeneously into clusters that function largely as discussion groups. The students are assigned semi-randomly. In the beginning of the year, the teachers has each student fill out a card with several people with whom he or she can work well, and any people with whom he or she may have a legitimate, debilitating conflict. She also takes into account her observations of negative combinations. After considering this information, she assigns the students to groups of four to five. The groups change every marking period, four times per year.

After journal writing and sharing, reading, and discussion, the class is over. It is the end of the marking period and the students have a book review due. Periodically, students select one book they read for their journals and complete an in-depth assignment in response to it. This time, they created menus for a restaurant based upon their book. This project yielded a variety of creative results. Students needed to apply character traits and themes when designing their foods. For example, one student created the appetizer "Mary Beth Soup: This soup has a taste of talent, but doesn't seem that way until you try it. Delicious wavy noodles and soft, shy vegetables." The main entrée incorporated the book's theme, the author's message, and the "Big Question." The students passed in this work, returned their materials to the round table, and headed to their next class.

Reading instruction in this classroom is characterized by the following practices:

1. Whole class grouping patterns for reading.
2. Direct instruction at the whole group level only.
3. Independent writing each day.
4. Daily independent and shared reading.
5. Integration of literature with other content areas.
6. A variety of opportunities for written and oral responses to reading.
7. Opportunity to select high interest books.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Opportunities for talented readers do exist within the whole-class assignments. Talented readers can be held to higher expectations, capitalize upon occasions for creativity, and take assignments to greater depths than other readers. An examination of the identified students' response journals revealed that much of the work's quality depended upon their time and motivation, and the quality of the books they were reading. Two of the three students whose journals were selected were involved with after-school activities and in-depth projects in other content areas. They read fewer books during the time period than the other students, suggesting that they did not spend as much time reading. These 2 students chose to read a mystery and a book based on a movie, even though the teacher does not allow students to read books with predictable plots. The third student was not as involved with after-school activities and read both historical and realistic fiction. Her journal entries showed more depth of thinking and understanding.

All three wrote an average of 3 pages during approximately 10 minutes of journal writing. The student who was not as involved with after school activities primarily received the highest assessment for her entries. She included two to three sentences summarizing what she read, identified a theme, related the theme to her personal experiences or the broader world, and identified "Big Questions." Some of her questions include:

- What brings people true happiness?
- Is greed powerful enough that people will risk their lives to get what they want?
- Can anyone be truly free?

She provided her personal answers to the questions. Her vocabulary is average, but her interpretation and ability to connect with her reading is exceptional, perhaps because she selected literature with characters of her gender and age. Her teacher's comments reward her thinking and often ask her to probe deeper with a question she provides or to give a clearer example of what she means.

The student who prefers mysteries is not as sequential as the first student. Her entries generally include all of the pieces the teacher looks for, but in a circuitous way. Sometimes, she forgets components and approximately 1/3 of her grades were in the middle of the assessment, instead of the highest marks. She can identify "Big Questions"

in her books, but it is a challenge. Her teacher felt many of her questions were obvious and did not reflect the level of thinking she was capable of:

- Is there more than one way to be kind?
- How do people deal with grief?
- How do people deal with fear?

The teacher's comments ask her to think deeper for her "Big Questions" and to think broadly when relating them to her life.

The third student did not read as many books over the marking period as the other two. His entries included all of the specified parts, but his connections and questions were weak and he received an equal number of middle and high assessments. One of his entries dealt with the theme of loss because one of his characters had lost an important item. He related that to having his special pen stolen and the United Nations' repeated searches for nuclear weapons in Iraq. Many of his "Big Questions" seemed literal, although he did have a few very powerful examples:

- Should people get mad at other people who are better than them [they] at something?
- Should people look up to others for advice and guidance or just do their own thing?
- Should people have a deadline for important things?

His teacher's comments did not really ask him to expand upon these questions or provide guidance on how to increase his thinking level when reading on his own.

The book reviews that are completed once per marking period are very open-ended. They allow talented readers to apply their interpretation skills and to express creativity in their responses. They consistently hand in clever written work that is very artistic and shows considerable interpretation and synthesis. For example, their peers admired the neat and artistic presentation of their book reviews and character trait appetizers that showed several plays on words and analogies.

The teacher places special emphasis on identifying themes and symbolism in reading. She has found that her talented readers need to develop these skills. By the time the research began, she reported that identifying theme and symbolism was second nature to these students.

Reading instruction for talented readers in the classroom observed is characterized by:

1. Assignments that offered room for talented readers to express interpretative and artistic talents.
2. High expectations for depth and complexity in their journal responses to reading.

3. Exposure to higher-order questions.
4. Opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning as independent readers.

Summary

Stanford Achievement Test and statewide assessment results for Betsy Ross Middle School demonstrate high achievement in reading. The reading program does appear to work well for these students. The school aims to improve differentiated instruction so that individual needs could be addressed in regular classroom. There are no visible or widespread modifications made for talented students in seventh grade reading classes now, as observed during this research. As changes are made to meet this new goal, more research will be needed to examine how differentiated instruction affects the success of this school's reading program.

To differentiate and maintain the same level of achievement, teachers will need to find effective strategies to determine the students' reading strengths and mastery of the regular curriculum. They will also need to manage students who have their reading curriculum compacted or accelerated and to find appropriate replacement material for students who would be over- or under-challenged by the standard curriculum. The hope is that these measures will improve the schools effectiveness in reading instruction and increase equity in reading achievement as teachers modify to meet individual needs in the heterogeneous classroom. Further research will be needed to assess this school-wide goal and how it affects the levels the school consistently attains.

CHAPTER 3: Center Public School

Fredric J. Schreiber
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**PK-8**
Student Population	**564**
Student Ethnicity:	
American Indian	**1%**
Asian	**2%**
Black	**21%**
Hispanic	**67%**
White	**10%**
Non-English Home Language	**69%**
English Language Learners	**4%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**67%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Center Public School's statewide assessment scores have shown consistent, but very modest increases since 1993, remaining on par with district performance, but well below state levels. It should be noted that all scores are representative of different cohorts and that inferences regarding the effectiveness of any intervention(s) would be better supported by a longitudinal study. This methodological orientation, for purposes of policy making or evaluation, is not supported by the central administration at the present time.

During the 1998-1999 school year Center's eighth grade statewide assessment scores in the areas of Reading, Writing, and Reading Degrees of Reading Power scores were disappointing, declining to 15%, 8%, and 15% at state goal for mastery, respectively; these declines follow several years of modestly increasing scores. As a result, Center Public's staff enacted initiatives aimed at improving both instruction and student learning. Strategies included statewide assessment reading/writing workbooks, monthly writing plans for narrative, expository and persuasive writing, 90-minute reading blocks, and the SRA/McGraw-Hill Direct Instruction Corrective Reading Program. These programs were used in both seventh and eighth grades, concurrent with the Success for All reading program in the lower grades.

An intensive statewide assessment preparation program was initiated in 1998 offering after-school and Saturday instruction, and a Summer school program; the following year, eighth grade students showed gains in Fall 1999 Reading (1998-15%, 1999-30%) and Writing scores (1998-8%, 1999-38%). However, as these scores are from two discrete student groups, and there are no seventh grade data, no inference of causality can be made. Interestingly, the sixth grade's Fall 1999 statewide assessment Reading, Writing and Reading DRP scores are the highest ever posted at the school (35%, 52%, and 50%, respectively), and although the cohort may change owing to population dynamics, Fall 2001 scores of the same group, then eighth graders, may reflect a continuation of the trend, suggesting some positive results from curriculum and instructional changes made in the interim.

Despite gains made, and the fact Center Public's eighth grades are performing at or above district Reading, Writing, and DRP levels, they are well below state levels. Approximately 70% of readers, and 62% of writers in the eighth grade are functioning below mastery level in the 1999-2000 school year. However, it should be noted that the highly transient population might need to be considered in any interpretation of the data.

Introduction to Center Public School

Center Public School is a medium sized, 2-story reddish brick structure of monolithic, modular construction style built in 1958 and renovated in 1997. Large classroom-length windows ring each floor and provide abundant natural light to the interior of the school, located on a slight rise at the base of a steep tree covered hill. To the rear of the property is a large asphalt playground with a basketball court, a jungle gym, and several foot-game areas painted on the surface. A large tree at the center of the play area provides shade on hot days and serves as a common gathering place both before and after school. On the opposite side of the school property is a large, new, enclosed activity area for the lower grade students. Staff and visitor parking is located in the front of the building along with a bus drop-off area under a large covered portico; access for students and teachers with disabilities is provided throughout the building. The grounds are nicely landscaped and well maintained, and the building is devoid of graffiti or defacement.

Center Public is located approximately 2 miles southwest of the center a major city on a busy four-lane road. To the northeast is a lower to middle class residential area interspersed with service industry and professional offices that surround and support the city's cultural center, primary healthcare facilities, and hospital. To the Southwest is an area of light manufacturing and shopping centers; a continuation of the residential area is found to the northeast. The community immediately surrounding the school is primarily Hispanic; housing primarily consists of well-kept starter homes; and a relatively new single-family home development has replaced a gang controlled low-income housing development. The vast majority of the student population lives in this proximal community, resulting in minimal bussing requirements; if transportation is required, it is provided by family members.

Within 1 mile of the school, on a 16-acre campus adjacent to a local college, is an innovative development project called "Learning Center." The campus is home to an elementary school, a middle school, and two regional high school programs; a community revitalization effort is also underway as part of this initiative. Center Public, as a member of this community, is making every effort to be associated with these projects. Counterbalancing these stabilizing developments are two neighborhood gangs whose territories converge on the school property. Although there are some indications of gang related events offsite, there is no explicit evidence in or around the school.

The interior of the school is clean, spacious, and well lit with bulletin boards along the hallways that display recently completed student projects. Center Public is a K-8 school and the grades are grouped together, and located in separate but adjoining wings with the lower grades situated on the ground floor, more or less separated from the older students. The lower grades are self-contained; seventh and eighth grades are combined into one large group, but subdivided according to subject/grade specific classes, and homerooms. Specials (art, music, industrial arts, etc.) are located in one wing of the building; the library is centrally located at the end of the main entrance hall. A new computer laboratory on the second floor is available for use by all students on a

scheduled basis. The main office is found immediately inside the front entrance; across the hall is a well-equipped healthcare office suite. Also found in the main hallway is a large bulletin board with information and inspirational messages for members of the school and the community. Also located on the ground floor is a large gymnasium with a regulation size basketball court and foldaway bleachers, an auditorium with raised stage and proscenium arch, and a full-service dining hall. On the second floor, located with the seventh/eighth grade classrooms, is a guidance office that also serves as a second, though informal, administrative office and meeting room. The remainder of the second floor is home to upper elementary classrooms.

Mission Statement

Center Public's mission statement and declaration of expectations, developed in partnership with the school, the family, and the community, are found on the bulletin board in the main entrance hallway. They state the following:

> The Center Public School will provide the foundation necessary for students to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitude to become professional contributing members of society and lifelong learners.

Center Public School's faculty, and staff's professional and personal conduct is guided by 5 belief statements and is posted alongside:

> We believe that each individual in our school community is valuable and deserves respect.
> We believe in the need for shared involvement of home, school, and community in developing, nurturing, and reinforcing the success of all who are part of the educational process.
> We believe that students learn best when they are active participants in the learning process.
> We believe that individuals should learn in a safe and positive environment.
> We believe all children are capable of learning.

Nearby, motivational slogans for students are displayed under title "Busy Bees."

> Busy Bee says . . . Every student should be reading for at least 20 minutes each evening.

Parent announcements offer three points of information along with an introductory remark:

> The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to:
>
> - Create a home environment that encourages learning;

- Communicate high yet reasonable expectations for their children's achievement in future careers;
- Become involved in the children's education in school and in the community.

The school's focus on reading skills conspicuously addressed throughout the entire building is evidenced by many prominently displayed announcements and posters offering encouragement for students and parents to read, to write, and to listen. The very first thing one sees on entering the main entrance is a large "Wanted" poster . . .

> Wanted: Volunteer listeners. The only requirement is to listen with enthusiasm and encourage a child to keep reading. If you're interested, please see Ms. Crow, room 226.

Strung across an arched portal leading to the library there is a richly illustrated banner "Rah! Rah! Rah! with the Alligator!!!" Beneath it a large, colorful poster extols students to: "Read at home every night for 20 minutes, don't forget to return your read and response forms!" with another banner, "Welcome Celebrity Readers," nearby. On another wall is yet another large poster, "Read at home!" and just below it a sign for the lower grades, "SFA all the way!!" A walk through the halls of the Center Public School produces the clear impression that reading, writing, and listening are the primary foci of the school, yet these sentiments exist within a school district that must address multiple issues.

Center Public is uniquely poised to implement a series of directives issued by the Superintendent having to do with a proposed 11-year plan to revitalize the school system. The most sweeping of these initiatives is to phase back the elementary schools to a K-8 model, thereby reverting to a more community-based school environment. Center Public has for some time been a model of this plan and will obviously have the opportunity to set the standard of performance for those schools who will be making the transition back to K-8. As a first step in this effort, each school identified a particular theme or to identify the school with some unique and specific area of instructional focus. For example, the school, in addition to its regular curricular activities, might choose to offer additional or enriched instructional opportunities in mathematics and science, technology, the arts; or a specific program of instruction such as Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), Creative Thinking (CT), or the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). This is using the "magnet school" concept. As stated by the Central administration and the Board of Education, the intent of initiating this process of choosing and developing an instructional theme for each school is that it will ultimately result in allowing each citizen to have a choice of schools within the city that will address the specific needs of their children.

School Administration

Having spent the last 9 years at Center Public, 7 of which as principal, JL is well acquainted with his staff, the community from which his students come, and the changes

taking place in the district as a whole. This familiarity, and a deep, abiding regard for students, parents, and staff, contributes strongly to the respect this affable gentleman receives. JL has been in the field of education for 23 years, having earned a Master's degree and a Sixth Year degree in administration from a state university before teaching seventh and eighth grade math at a local middle school for 12 years; from there he moved to Center Public where he has remained.

JL is completely involved with every aspect of the operation of the school and is rarely found behind his desk or closed doors. This focus on the job of educating children while assuming the role of academic leader, is of utmost importance to him, but is countered by the need to personally oversee day-to-day operations associated with building management; disciplinary duties; teacher evaluations; safety issues; and staff, student, parent, and central administration communications and documentation. Moreover, a flurry of new initiatives has recently been mandated for implementation by central administration aimed at standardizing instruction and curriculum with the intent of raising statewide assessment scores. These new initiatives are accompanied by a call for a concurrent restructuring of the academic environment by the superintendent's request that this school adopt the theme of enrichment for all students. Due to this request, JL is placed in a position of having to mollify a growing sense of frustration and tension within and among the ranks, much of it owing to a dearth of support or training for the existing staff. The upshot is a reactive rather than proactive environment that at times either gets in its own way or stalls owing to apathetic neglect on the part of the teachers who wait for the pendulum of change to reverse course or be supplanted by a new superintendent.

Regardless of the obstacles, JL's position regarding the current Language Arts program is that it is vital and necessary, and a step in the right direction owing to a number of factors. Foremost is his belief that prior to the new administration's district-wide introduction of the Success for All (SFA) and other direct instrument remedial programs and grade-level classroom Houghton-Mifflin series instructional program, the use of some five different, unsynchronized reading series was the fundamental impediment to success in reading for at-risk students who are primarily Hispanic. He points out that the community has a high transient rate and that a youngster might well attend a number of different schools in one year, with none of the bilingual reading series matching the mainstream English reading series. Therefore, if one standardizes and unifies the curriculum and text series adoptions, then the whole system benefits, as "everyone will be on nearly the same page at nearly the same time." Though he does not believe this to be an optimal solution, it does address the specific existent shortcoming associated with transience. In the long term, JL foresees a more flexible and responsive arrangement evolving that acknowledges and enacts beneficial practices from multiple instructional models, as he explains:

> I don't see the schools subscribing to Success for All for more than two or three more years. . . . [In its place] you set up flexible grouping, which is really kind of a homogeneous grouping and you block off 90 minutes or two hours of literacy. There are certain things within the reading component that you would do. There

> would be associated writing; there would be vocabulary words; there would be the phonemic awareness component; there would be cooperative learning; there would be partner reading and out loud reading to work on fluency; and there would be work on decoding skills. We'll probably follow the structure that's been established with programs like SFA, but eventually I think we'll evolve into different programs that have a more world-rounded approach to instruction.

School Library and Librarian/Media Specialist

Center Public's library, which services the school's PK-eighth grade students, is located on the ground floor, at the far end of the end of the main entrance hallway; waist-high to ceiling windows onto the hall and playground run the length of the room that is approximately twice the size of a regular classroom, producing a spacious, well lit environment. There are approximately 7,500 print volumes and 20 assorted news, informative, and entertainment magazines and periodicals available. There is one print capable computer workstation with direct Internet access; it has up-to-date word processing, spreadsheet, publishing, encyclopedic reference, and assorted multimedia software installed. The library uses a Dewey decimal card catalogue system and a manual checkout/return tracking system resulting in an unacceptable loss rate according to AG, the person in charge of the facility—there is no Librarian. The position of Librarian is filled by a full-time substitute who has no formal Information Services training but is computer/programming literate at the undergraduate level; he has no instructional training or teaching experience. An American Library Association (ALA) certified individual whose health problems over the past 2 years have prevented a regular presence holds the official staff position. This has resulted in a library lacking any centrally organized or directed functions; AG's primary responsibility has been stack maintenance and student oversight; he does indicate there is an active book purchase program. As AG explained,

> . . . principal L asked me to stay on here full-time when the regular librarian took sick leave around December; I was subbing part-time before then. I'm supposed to help out stacking books and watching the kids. I'm not a librarian, so I've had to sort of learn on the job what to do.

Asked if he expects to be here next year, AG suggests he may be asked back full-time but is not sure. JL confirms the circumstance and a lack of concrete plans to resolve the situation; it is apparently not a high-priority issue, as even funding for the position is in doubt. This is a curious state-of-affairs, given the emphasis placed on the Language Arts program by both the school and the district.

Library usage is scheduled for PK through sixth grade on a regular basis, but the library primarily functions as a relief period for those teachers, as opposed to instructionally oriented activities. There is no formal time scheduled at any time during the week for either the seventh or eighth grade; their library use is on a project-specific, request-only basis; AG reports minimal use by this group with those availing themselves

of the facility demonstrating little direction and few research skills. In addition to these activities, the school psychologist, counselors, and SFA instructor use the library for student evaluations, conferences, meetings, and instructional sessions.

Classroom Reading Instruction and the Regular Reading Program

The seventh and eighth grade Reading Program at Center Public includes two distinct parts: Direct Instruction (DI) for below grade level readers; and a district standardized language arts program for all other students; the SFA reading program is district mandated for PK-sixth grades. There are no specialized or differentiated instructional program or opportunities for above grade level readers.

On or above grade level readers in seventh and eighth grades are scheduled into a "standard curriculum" Language Arts program taught by one instructor. Those students having completed the SFA program in sixth grade and identified as reading below grade level are placed in a DI reading program, also mandated by the district, and taught by a second Language Arts. instructor who has received specific training in the course material and method of delivery.

The DI program is mandated for all identified seventh, eighth, and some ninth grade students throughout the entire district. Program material and all instructor training is produced and provided for by SRA/McGraw Hill. DI is highly scripted, is remedial in nature, and focuses on developing phonetically based decoding skills. The classes are 45 minutes in length and there are 2 instructors assigned to the program, one of whom teaches only this subject, while the other teaches DI and Special Education/Resource Room. Inclusion in the DI program is determined by performance on a screening test supplied by the programs producers; additional sources of information concerning students' reading skills, such as statewide assessment reading scores, SFA performance, and teacher evaluations are also considered. According to JL, only about 20% of Center Public's seventh and eighth grade students score above the test criteria for inclusion in DI; those 20% who do meet the criteria are assigned to a "standard literature class." DI was instituted as a complementary follow-on to the concentrated K-6 SFA reading program, as a result of complaints by the high schools concerning the "really, really low reading scores of the kids going on to ninth grade." According to JL, the DI program was adopted district-wide as a result of the efforts of the principals to institute the adoption of a schoolwide reading reform model "that . . . had a really strong basis in phonological worthiness."

For those students meeting the DI criteria, a standard literature class is scheduled. The seventh and eighth grade literature class is taught by LB, who is new to the school this year, having been transferred from a long-held high school level position; she is one of 19 teachers who were involuntarily transferred to different schools in the district at the end of last year. The move was not disciplinary in nature and LB would have much preferred to remain as a high school English teacher. Much to her delight, LB will not be returning to Center Public next year as her request for transfer back to a high school has

been approved. It is apparent she is not happy in her current situation and indicated so during a number of discussions. JL has been aware of the situation for some time and feels the instructional quality is not what it might have been otherwise, had there been more of a commitment and fewer absences due to illness—a contributing cause for the initial transfer.

LB, the only regular Language Arts teacher for seventh and eighth grade students at Center Public, explained that she is unaware of any specified curriculum for the class she teaches; neither is there a specified textbook. Moreover, she relates that upon receiving this assignment, her instructions from the principal were, "basically . . . to teach the persuasive essays for the statewide assessment."

Many textbooks of several different varieties are available in the room, but are mostly of the McDougal-Littel, "Reading Literature," series; LB makes use of these as the primary text as it is her understanding M-L is used in the district through the twelfth grade, "So I thought it would provide some sort of a continuity of format anyway, the same textbook, the same strategy, and so on." "The Language of Literature," also by McDougal-Littel, is used as a supplement, though only the teacher's edition is available, so copies of the material are made and distributed to students as required for a day's lesson.

In addition to textbooks, her classes are provided the opportunity to participate in two field trips wherein students attend theatrical events. Prior to the excursions, LB invites an actor to visit the class and conduct workshops pertaining to the play the students will be attending; after viewing the performance, students visit with the actors on and behind stage and so have an opportunity to see the inner workings of a theatrical production and the profession itself. LB also explained that she is in the process of establishing an Internet-based "pen-pal" group as another means by which students can apply skills developed in class to real world situations.

The classes themselves are, to some extent, ability grouped, and more advanced seventh grade readers, as identified by the statewide assessment or teacher recommendation, attend eighth grade classes; the process is reversed for less able eighth grade students. There are 2 sixth graders who have been identified as having exhibited superior reading skills, and they are scheduled into regular seventh grade classes. There is no other formal differentiation in any of the classes, and all students in a class work on the same material as selected and presented by LB. There are no in-class libraries, free choice reading opportunities other than 20-minute at-home reading assignments, occasions for regular or easily accessed work on the Internet, nor any other enrichment activities available or provided for above-grade-level readers. There is a new computer lab available for research and/or report writing; use is by request, and scheduled on an advance notification basis.

Seventh and Eighth Grades Reading and Language Arts Classrooms

LB is allowed complete freedom in the (re)structuring of classroom lessons, as was evidenced during five observations; consequently, each observation was different

though some consistencies surfaced. For any given lesson, at a particular grade level, on a single topic, the method of delivery is common. However, the next unit might be quite different and this extends to seating arrangements as well as instructional material. One such session, the second, will be related with commentary on notable differences and similarities to other observations of the same class.

On Friday morning, at 8:30 AM—the beginning of first period—LB has just returned to class having been out for the better part of a week. Students are milling about the room talking with friends; some have taken seats. The mixed seventh/eighth grade class consists of 23 students, 12 of whom are female and 11 male; all are Hispanic except for one student of Asian descent. The desks are set in a "U" facing the chalkboard and LB's desk; I am later told the previous day's substitute teacher did this. The students have arranged themselves in what appears to be friendly, gender specific groups with the boys at the back and in the far corners. LB does not assign seats and the boy/girl split is typical of all the classes observed. However, previous classes were arranged by row, with the boys exhibiting a noticeable tendency to position themselves at the back of the room where they were left nearly undisturbed, except when being reprimanded because of some disruption. In this configuration there was also the tendency for the more "directed" students to stay to the front where they received more personal and immediate attention; these students were mostly females.

This is a second floor classroom, as are all the regular seventh and eighth grade classes; it is well lit with windows across the entire outside wall. The walls are covered with large colorful posters extolling the students to excel in what they do, to be confident, and remember the rules of writing, reading, and personal conduct; there are also examples of student work on exhibit. There were no instances where it was observed that these posters were referred to by either the teacher or the students. At the front of the room is LB's desk, immediately behind it, backed up against the wall, is a single computer on a small table, with a single chair. Along one wall is a counter with some McDougal-Littel textbooks and a number of assorted paperbacks. There is also a portable chalkboard to one side of the room and across it is scrawled a racial epithet—there will be no notice, comment, or action taken to remove it until halfway through the next period.

LB explains that these students are "at and above grade level," and "represent our finest in action." With this, the class begins at 8:35. There is a quick mention this is "Women's History Month," and consequently is the impetus of today's lesson focusing on Florence Nightingale. Specifically, they will be considering the Crimean War, medical practice in the 19th century, and the role of women and men during a time of war in England during the Victorian period. LB lectures for a time on the subject and outlines what is expected of them as part of this unit—they must finish reading Florence Nightingale's biography by next week, as they will at that time begin a study of A. L. Tennyson's, "The Charge of the Light Brigade." It is now 8:45 and some of the boys at the back of the room are beginning to get rather talkative.

LB says, "Ok class, let's turn to page 305," but there is a bit of confusion, as textbooks have not been handed out—this will take a few minutes. LB directs some students to distribute the texts as she prepares a micro tape recorder for playback. LB is ready, books are open to the correct page, and the students are beginning to settle down; LB starts the tape. The passage being considered is autobiographical in nature—LB has recorded it in its entirety and is playing it back; the class does not seem to be expecting this and they begin talking quietly amongst themselves making it impossible to hear the words. The size of the tape recorder does not add to the clarity or ease of listening, and as there are two large "boom-boxes" in the room one wonders why they were not used instead. When later asked, LB confides the recording was done last night at home and this recorder was all that was available and the formats are incompatible. She does not mention why a tape recorder was used. When asked why, LB explains that she when has used this technique in the past, she has found that the students pay more attention to what is being said. Two of the boys in the back of the room are messing around and need to be settled down, but they have missed the opening. The class is instructed that they must follow along in their textbooks.

As the tape plays, 14 students are actively following the story in the textbook; the other nine students are doing other things. Some are talking quietly to one another, some are doing work for another class, and two are changing book covers. LB sits with arms and legs crossed in a chair behind her desk. She appears to be listening closely to the tape but disconnected from the class—there is no eye contact made with any student for nearly 5 minutes. The time is now 8:50 and 10 students appear to be actively following the story.

The taped reading of the passage is completed at 8:52 and directions for their classwork are given—these, too, have been recorded on the tape. Students are instructed they should understand and remember certain vocabulary words, and answer three questions pertaining to what was revealed in the story. The questions and vocabulary are also found at the end of the section in the textbook. The questions are as follows:

1. Florence Nightingale did not live her life as her family expected her to. What did her family expect her to do with her life? Quote sentences from the text to prove your answer.
2. List at least three of the poor hospital conditions that horrified Florence Nightingale.
3. What do you think were the reasons why doctors changed their attitudes about Florence Nightingale?

Some students complain they could not hear the story or the instructions. After the tape has finished and the recorder is turned off, a student comments in a loud voice, "You coulda just read it." LB does not respond; the student turns around and stares at me quizzically—she is one of the young girls sitting toward the front of the class. With this, 2 boys who paid the least attention ask to go to the lavatory—they are allowed to go together and do not return until the end of class.

LB summarizes the assignment and begins to circulate, but only observes what the students are doing. Most students are doing something that appears to be related to the assignment as they are writing. This activity lasts about 3 minutes at which time only 4 students are actively working; the rest of the class members are talking amongst themselves. It is 9:00 when LB asks very quietly if "Anyone need my help?" There is no response and LB returns to her seat behind the desk.

By 9:02, the noise level has steadily increased to a level where it is difficult to follow individual conversations; LB focuses on two of the more vocal girls who are seated near the back of the room—"If you don't want to work, go out in the hall!" They quiet down; LB stands up and moves toward the center of the "U," asking "Any help? Any help?" as the 2 girls start up again. After her moving back into the center of the classroom some students begin work again. As of 9:04, 10 of 24 students are working on the assignment, 6 of whom are female, with one student (female) having completed and handed it in. Three minutes later 3 female students are still working, the others having returned to more social pursuits. Collection of the assignment begins at 9:08 and continues sporadically until 9:14 at which time the class is lined up at the door and dismissed. The bell signaling the end of class rings 3 minutes later at 9:17.

After they left the room, students' written responses were reviewed by the researcher. As requested by LB, the students' work was then left on her desk to be graded and returned. In a later discussion with students about feedback on their responses, they indicated that papers and assignments were returned at the end of the year.

A quick and informal check of the students' written responses, based on completely arbitrary, ad hoc descriptors reveals the following:

- Only 2 students answered all questions with appropriate seventh and eighth grade level responses;
- There were 15 "brief" responses, no gender information, (1 short, simple sentence per question, all questions answered); and
- 6 males produced "sparse" responses, (no complete sentences, and/or less than 3 questions answered).

Summarizing time use during this period, the following schedule is relatively consistent for all observed lessons:

:05 (minutes)—Administrative, greetings, and "settling down";
:10—Introduction to the topic and review of pertinent material;
:11—Lecture
:12—Student work on assignment(s);
:06—Collection of work sheets and or written assignments;
:03—Dismissal activities.

Regular reading instruction in this at and above grade level language arts classroom is characterized by the following practices:

1. Student selected seating arrangements;
2. Teacher/tape directed and executed whole class group instruction;
3. Follow along and/or independent reading;
4. Independent, in-class writing assignments;
5. Occasional homework—reading of handouts (textbooks are not taken out of the classroom) and associated writing assignments;
6. Long-term projects were referenced in interviews, but none were actually observed being planned or in progress;
7. No integration of other subject areas into the Language Arts program; and
8. Fewer than half the students actually engaged in the lesson.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

No organized program exists for talented readers in classes observed at the Center Public School, nor are there any planned opportunities for this population in the future. Enrichment activities for grade level and gifted students are limited to twice-yearly trips to locally sponsored, professional theatrical events, supported by in-class actor/teacher workshops.

Summary

Reading instruction at Center School includes an emphasis on direct instruction for students who are still struggling. Instruction is very prescriptive and it is a phonetically based decoding system. The pedagogical approach to reading is an adherence to scripted steps with limited involvement of students. There was no attempt to engage students in thinking about their reading. If students have mastered reading skills at an appropriate level of comprehension, they participated in a literature class. Opportunities for talented readers to expand their skills and abilities were not evident.

CHAPTER 4: Connor Elementary School

Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**K-4**
Student Population	**277**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**1%**
Black	**5%**
Hispanic	**60%**
White	**34%**
Non-English Home Language	**42%**
English Language Learners	**28%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**72%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

A small percentage of fourth grade students met the statewide reading and writing goals. In reading, only 20% of fourth grade students reach the standard on the Degrees of Reading Power Test. In writing, the percentage of students who would be able to complete language arts tasks with minimal assistance from teachers is only 19%. In addition, the participation rate in the statewide tests is 10% below the statewide level, 82% versus 92.2%, respectively.

At Connor Elementary School, fewer students met the statewide goals in reading and writing than at the district level. In the district, 27% of the fourth grade students met the reading goal and 36% met the writing goal. All of the performance levels at Connor Elementary School were quite low, compared to the statewide scores.

Introduction to Connor Elementary School

Connor Elementary School, built in 1913, is the oldest elementary school in the city. Upon entering the three storied brick building one gets a sense of its past and a look into its future. The building has been a consistent place in the education of residents over 9 decades. In its newly renovated state, it will continue to play a key role. Classrooms are spacious with high ceilings and large windows providing an airy, sunny atmosphere. Wide, carpeted hallways often serve as an extension of the classrooms. Throughout the day there are pockets of activity—small groups of students are huddled with an adult extending their learning or engaging in student-led discussions. The pride of the faculty and students in their accomplishments is visibly displayed throughout the school. Whether it is artwork, poetry, short stories, or science or social studies projects, visitors can always find something creative to view.

Walking through the halls, one is greeted by the sounds of energetic and happy children. Friendly interactions between classrooms occurs on a daily basis—not only

within grade level but across grade levels through a strong "learning buddies" program. One can see the excitement and pride students have in helping one another learn.

The student population is culturally diverse, with a large bilingual component. Although the population at the school is approximately 60% Hispanic, few children are heard speaking Spanish as they enter the school. Most speak English and seem happy and excited to be in school. This multicultural setting provides both an opportunity and a challenge. Connor's commitment to teaching and reaching all students is reflected in its Mission Statement: "All students are educated within a broad cultural environment that enriches student learning, values and respect for others." Each grade level has both regular and bilingual classrooms, but in third grade, the majority of instruction is in English and by fourth grade, only English is supposed to be used.

Bilingual classes end in the fourth grade, and students who enter after fourth grade are mainstreamed into regular classes with support from bilingual teachers. In fifth grade, all classes are mixed and that continues in the middle school (Grades 6-8) and the high school (Grades 9-12). A concerted effort has been made to complete the daily integration of these two cultural groups. This aggressive approach to integration has solidified the student body. One can see warm, friendly interactions between students during daily recess, lunch, and after school activities.

Connor Elementary is located in the heart of the city, and the neighborhood around the school includes beautiful, old Victorian homes, along with vacant, boarded-up properties that previously were residences and small businesses. The area also has activities associated with urban life, which are closely monitored by the local police department, such as selling drugs and prostitution.

Because many of the children and families come from homes that are financially needy, Connor Elementary has become more than the local elementary school. It serves as a community center, nursery school, and extended family through the Connor Family Resource Center. This program also provides before-and-after school sessions on parenting issues and achievement in reading. A full-time social worker, home/school liaison, and school psychologist provide additional family support. Connor's Mission Statement reflects this commitment to the "whole" child and its expectation that "all children can learn" and "produce knowledgeable, creative and critical thinkers."

Entering the school on several different visits, many diverse scenes greet visitors. Directly outside the school, a Latina teenager hurries across the busy intersection; she brings a baby to the family resource center on the ground floor of the school. Immediately across the street, a dilapidated house is decorated by a broken down washing machine outside the house on the sidewalk, while on a subsequent visit, the washing machine is gone and in its place is a dusty air conditioner that lies vertically on the sidewalk. Family houses surrounding the school vary in appearance, as some that are neatly maintained and others are in need of paint and care. While in some areas, chaos reigns immediately outside the school; inside it is different. On all observations, the school is quiet and orderly. Discipline is clear and students are able to work quietly in

every class observed. Students move quietly throughout the hallways, and the soft hum of children working in classrooms pervades the school throughout the day. On every day that children were observed at the opening of school, they moved quickly to their classrooms.

The hallways are carpeted with blue carpet, reducing noise in the hallway. The walls in the classrooms are not covered by student work as it appears that an attempt has been made to maintain the condition of the painted walls. Students' work is displayed on bulletin boards throughout the school. The classrooms are spacious and orderly with many materials present and on display in all classrooms on every visit. On one visit, a special education student who appeared to be in some kind of crisis was observed being walked quietly to the office with his aide and teacher. Concern and caring for the student were obvious.

School Administration

Much at Connor Elementary has changed over the last 2 years since the arrival of the current principal, CT, a busy person with warmth for the children and the teachers around her. She assumed this position after leaving two previous positions as Superintendent. In earlier years, she had held multiple roles in education as classroom teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. She has extensive background in special education and has a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in English Education. As a former Superintendent of Schools, she promised the Superintendent in this district that she would give 2 years to this position and try to increase scores, but she made no further commitment, and at the time of this report, rumors were circulating that she was considering accepting another superintendent's position.

CT is intense and appears to be a very hard worker. She spends a good deal of time in meetings and assigns many duties to others, such as control of the reading program to the Instructional Consultant. She is angered by the recent designation of Connor Elementary as one of the 10 lowest scoring schools in the state and is careful to clarify how much every teacher in the school is doing to change this situation. As she explained the reading program, she was able to provide examples of how the staff has implemented a number of programs to try to move scores up and she points with pride to the fact that this school did not adopt a direct instruction model like Success for All. She and a few staff members visited several districts and schools that were using Direct Instruction Models like Success for All and were "appalled by what they saw." This group believed that these models would take "every ounce of creative energy out of the lives of teachers" so, they chose to do an alternative program. They wrote a 50-page document that they were required to submit to the State Department of Education to defend why they wanted to maintain a literature-based approach to reading combined with a phonics approach for students who read below state goal, instead of using a direct instruction approach like SFA.

CT seems knowledgeable about curriculum and has a general understanding of the various curricular areas and what has been accomplished to meet curricular objectives. When specific questions were asked about the reading program, CT referred those to the KW, the instructional consultant, who she explained was primarily responsible for reading and for writing instruction in the school.

Curriculum Specialist

KW has been in the school for a number of years and is very knowledgeable and efficient. She explained how hard teachers work and discussed the fact that teachers were implementing new programs in reading, language arts, spelling, and science. She described the writing program as holistic, and explained that many of the first graders who were transitional met the statewide assessment goal by the time they reached the fourth grade. She explained that they used many different programs to reach students. For example, to reach young writers, they implemented a program designed to empower marginal writers. The program stresses writing for elaborate detail and description. They have phonics instruction with guided reading phonics. They use multiple resources to help increase the statewide assessment scores, including small books published by Stock-Vaugn Berrent.

Remediation includes multiple opportunities for students to gain skills in many different ways, including after school activities 2 days a week in which between 20 and 35 students in third grade have snacks and do reading activities in an after-school program developed to help them take the statewide assessment in fourth grade. After the test was given in fourth grade, 20 of 40 students in fourth grade attend a fourth grade after-school program to help them continue to improve in reading and writing.

For students reading at an above average level, there is guided reading in classrooms and they use curriculum compacting to eliminate work students have already mastered. After compacting, students have the opportunity to pursue reading in an area of their own choice. The freedom and flexibility to go above and beyond is provided for all above grade level students.

KW considers herself to be the procurer and guide. She is adept at diagnosing reading problems and works as a coach to help teachers develop more skills in teaching reading. Every January and June, each teacher tests every student to see if s/he has grown and to check progress. Early Literacy and peer coaching with teachers and regional service center representatives helps teachers to improve their skills.

Teachers in the school use the Harcourt Porale Collection that suggests above, middle, and below level texts for the whole class, and their approach to instruction is to use Balanced Reading, a combination of literature and phonics. They use the Cast-a-Spell spelling program, reading instruction is completed with flexible grouping by reading levels, and separate achievement groups are broken down into reading levels. They will modify/change students' groups, depending on available resources and by

mastery of skill. The school does use Reading Recovery as one teacher is trained in the methodology, but only 4 students are able to participate in that intensive program at any given time.

In addition to the Instructional Consultant, the school has 2 full-time reading consultants and 1 full-time reading instructional assistant. They break classrooms into groups, and the reading staff meet weekly to discuss records and further discuss switching groups to make reading groupings more appropriate. They have leveled all the guided reading books to make clear the challenge that can be available for students; they believe they are on the way to better instruction and higher scores. They also use summer school to increase reading abilities. Students who are below mastery on the statewide assessment must attend summer school, and parent programs and a parent resource center are also provided to help support low-scoring students.

The use of ongoing assessment has helped KW and the teachers to understand that many teachers were having kids read low-level materials. They use assessment now throughout the year and their goal is to have students become fully independent readers. The district has set stricter levels for each grade level and provided funds so that students who do not meet grade level goal go to summer school. She explained that classroom libraries in each classroom are necessary because the instructional range is so wide in any one-grade level. Because this school has the lowest state statewide assessment scores in this district and is in the bottom 10 schools in the state, both the state and the district office have provided additional resources. Books are not a problem and neither is class size. With the assistance from the district central office and the support of the principal, the maximum class size has been reduced to 18-20.

School Library and the Librarian/Media Specialist

The library is a warm and inviting place that is filled with books. All types and colors and shapes of books are in abundance in every corner and on every flat space, with the exception of 2 or 3 tables spaced throughout the library where teachers come to work with small groups of students. Colorful picture books are on display all over the library. A volunteer quietly returns books to their designated space. It is clear from observations that the restocking is necessary because there are so many books being used on a daily basis. The library is also filled with puppets, attractive photos, and children's illustrations of their favorite books, such as *The Legend of the Bluebonnet* and *Owl at Home*. The room has 4 windows on 2 sides and is light and airy. Low stools are scattered around the room and plants and flowers spread across shelves of bookcases. Large stuffed animals on the floor seem to invite children to sit with them while they read. On one wall are a television monitor and quiet spaces for reading on the floor and in corners. No students were in the library during the reading observation with the exception of the 2 girls from the high reading group from the third grade class being observed. A computer area with 5 computers in use by 2 teachers is on the right side of the library as one enters, and alpha smart keyboards are available for students taking notes. A large collection of videotapes

is available as is an extensive collection of nonfiction books. Again, there are variety and depth of choices.

During interviews, the librarian who works in the school on a full-time basis, indicated that the high ability readers in Mr. T's class visited the library three or four times each week from their regular classroom setting. They spent time in the library reading books of their own choice. When asked if she guided their choices, she indicated that they almost always brought books with them. Occasionally, she watched as they selected books, but she did not direct them to more challenging books, as she considered this free reading time. She indicated that there were a number of advanced books available to students who read above level. She pointed with pride to the Living Books series that enables students to have a book read to them in either English or Spanish. It is clear that she loves books, but she readily volunteered that the majority of her time is spent looking for material to support remedial readers, as this is the charge in the school. Next to the library is a large room that houses even more books and is directed by the Literacy Coordinator. Hundreds of books are neatly arranged in plastic crates bearing authors' last names. There are a vast variety of books for students of different levels of ability and reading achievement that are organized by instructional level and are available to teachers for students who need additional support or challenge or just other books. KW, the instructional leader in the school, explained that these are leveled to make selection easier.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The third grade classroom is very large and painted a soft blue. A number of charts are available at various places around the room documenting schedules for the day and indicating birthdays in various months. A visible chart on a large file cabinet describes what to do when you are angry. Another chart explains what to do when you are stuck on a word. A large chart detailing cursive letters is at the top of the classroom, circling the classroom. The classroom library includes about 250 books in small green bins at the back of the classroom and in small bookcases. Some of the books are in class sets and others are individual novels. Most seem to be at the first through third grade level. The majority of the books seem to be targeted for slightly below grade level reading. A television is mounted in the corner of the room and a video camera is in the corner of the class. A table is at the back of the room that is occasionally used for reading instruction.

At 8:40 in the morning, the third grade classroom is a bright and cheerful place with 6 large windows where the breeze blows in quietly in both the fall and the spring. The classroom has 19 students, 9 girls and 10 boys. The male teacher who is in his first year of teaching begins the day with quiet greetings to all of his students who appear happy to be in the class. The class is quiet and orderly. All conversation is in English, although it is clear that many of these students are bilingual. A bilingual third grade classroom is across the hall, but the 2 classes are separate and the students in the two-way bilingual class are in that classroom full-time. They speak English for approximately half

to two-thirds of the time that they are in class and will be fully integrated into fourth grade by next year. Students work quietly on their homework that they hand in to their teacher. He collects it and boxes in reward checks on a matrix on the wall, using colored boxes. While he chats and collects homework, the students work on a "Cast-a-Spell Word Search Puzzle" with vocabulary that is challenging for the majority of the students. The class begins with an organized approach to the day. After the pledge of allegiance, the students begin with sharing time. Approximately half the class is Hispanic and the rest are White; almost all students listen carefully as a young girl shares a nest with eggs that she has found in her aunt's yard. The majority of the children begin to listen and watch as the nest is passed around. The word search puzzle is kept on the desk and as some children begin to lose interest in what is being passed around, the teacher directs some students to go back to work on their puzzles. After the first young girl finished sharing her story, a second gets up to the front of the class, sits quietly, and begins to tell a brief story about what happened to her over the weekend, explaining that she has been sick. She is a very happy young girl who smiles frequently. She then selects another student from the rest of the class whose turn it is to share, but this is not done randomly. Rather, the classroom teacher, again, reflecting organization provides her with the choices that she has for selecting the next person who shares.

A young boy is selected next and he begins to tell a story about how he and his cousin were throwing rocks and got into trouble because of the rocks. Everyone listens politely to the sharing time and an invitation is offered for questions and comments for students in the class. The teacher asks a question about where the rocks are being thrown and listens politely to the response. As the young boy answers the questions, most others in the class listen. The teacher tries to suggest, quietly, that at a school field day in the future, the student may want to become involved in a softball throwing competition. It is obvious that he has listened and wants to suggest a positive use of this energy.

The teacher explains how he divided the class into at least four reading groups in the classroom. He meets with the lowest three groups at least four times a week, but explains that he usually sees the top group only twice a week, and sometimes does not meet that goal. "They are reading above grade level so I don't work with them as often, as there is such a need to move the students below grade level up to level," he explained. Indeed, in this class, he has several students who will have to attend summer school or be retained, due to a new state initiative on having students reach mastery levels on the statewide assessment. He has a Chapter 1 math teacher who comes in to work with the entire class three times each week for math instruction, and he has an aide who works with him for 45 minutes a day for 4 days a week. He has asked her to come in during reading to accommodate the different groupings. When he is meeting with one group, she can work with individual students. The reading lesson begins with the teacher calling for a group to meet with him. As he continues, he explains that some students are going to have to work on the paper that they handed in previously, as they have missed the point on main idea. He explains that if they have a certain sticker on their paper, they have completed the assignment and if not, they need to complete it. He further explains that the students who have done the assignment and are not going to meet with him can begin on "SSR." The students seem to understand that this means Sustained Silent

Reading and some immediately begin to read. Others go back to their Cast-a-Spell word search puzzle. Some students seem surprised when their papers are returned to them needing more work, but most read the suggestions quietly and begin to work. Desks are grouped in rows of three together, and there are two groupings of three students together. Two individual desks with boys sitting in them are right next to the teacher's desk. Throughout this time period order and quiet prevail in the room. The teacher moves quietly around the room checking with students and discussing their papers.

The next phase of instruction starts and the teacher calls for the "Chalk Box Kids" to move to the back of the classroom. They do so and sit in a row of 4 desks that have been previously arranged. The teacher asks if anyone has the other books, as there are supposed to be 4 books and there are only 3. He indicates to the rest of the class for the next 20 minutes that they are to do their work and not interrupt him. The rest of the class begins to work quietly. Two young girls move to the computer and begin working. One young boy at the back of the classroom begins reading quietly. The 4 boys in the back of the room (in the Chalk Box Kids) sit quietly as their teacher works with them. He reviews the point at which they stopped reading, and distributes the books that the students share quietly. The 4 boys spread out in a row and begin to read quietly. Another young girl in the class begins to read quietly. A young boy approaches Mr. T and asks a question about what he is to do. Mr. T responds to him quietly indicating again that this is a time that he will spend with this reading group and redirecting him to do his work. He reminds the class that this reading time is for finishing their work and for SSR. If they do not do SSR, he assures them that he has a pile of other work that they can begin to work on and it will not involve self-selected reading. The young boy goes to the teacher's desk and selects a reading book. The majority (all, but 1 or 2) of the students are engaged and working.

Mr. T returns to the students who sit quietly in a row in the back of the room. The book they are reading is a short book. One boy reads indicates that he has finished the book, but he agrees to read aloud to Mr. T who listens and helps with a word. Mr. T moves to the next student who is struggling with some words, offering quiet help and encouragement. The next 2 boys sit together and one reads quietly while the other one listens.

As Mr. T begins to move toward the other 2 students, he slips quietly to the side of the room where a block of 9 students continues to work on their revisions of their papers. One girl who has shared earlier with the class chats quietly with the other students for the majority of the time, sharing photos from the book she is reading and distracting other students. The majority of the students remain on task for the next few minutes after Mr. T has gone over to redirect them. As he glances up when they begin to demonstrate off-task behavior, the behavior stops. The little boy in the front of the Chalk Box Kids has finished the book and returns it to Mr. T, and then walks over to a girl at the back of the class. The other boys in the reading group continue to read quietly. The boy who has finished the book returns to the rest of the class and begins reading a new book, taking his position back at the front of the classroom.

Mr. T quietly moves the girl who has been the most talkative and social to the front of the class away from most of the other students. A young boy does not have an SSR book and searches in his desk for a book after he has finished his Cast-a-Spell word search. The boys in the reading group continue reading, and sit quietly. The boy at the front of the line finishes a second book and Mr. T gets him a big book to read entitled *How Plants Grow*.

Two young girls from the highest reading group search the web in the corner of the room for Three Little Women, a rock group. A young boy at the side of the room reads a book entitled *Extremely Weird Reptiles*, and another young girl reads a simple picture book. A boy reads another easy text picture book entitled *Haunted House*, while 2 other students read a book entitled *Ghosts.* The 2 girls explain that there are 4 girls in the highest reading group, and they explain how they are able to do alternative assignments for reading. Two are searching the web for information they are interested in about female rock stars and two others are reading self-choice books. The two on the computer seem happy and very engaged and chat happily when they find a web site about Britney Spears. An instructional aide enters the classroom and quietly approaches a student in the back of the room who is not doing anything. He is the student who had told Mr. T that he does not have an SSR book. She checks his work and gives him permission to go to a reading center at the front of the classroom. He puts in a tape and begins to listen as a book is read to him on tape. In the meantime, the aide begins to move around the room chatting with students. At this point, there is active engagement in the back of the room with the teacher. With the permission of the aide, 2 students leave the room to use the bathroom. The little boy sitting closest to the students who are on line checking out rock stars stops reading and watches as they access Britney Spears' website. The 4 boys who have been in the Chalk Box Group finish reading to their teacher and are moved to the back of the classroom where they are given black pieces of paper, chalk, and the big book about how things grow. Another adult looking for information about a student interrupts Mr. T. The 4 boys in the Chalk Box Group work quietly in the back of the classroom, following directions carefully. All, but 3 students remain engaged in work. It has been approximately 35 minutes since the reading lesson began.

The next reading group is called to the back of the classroom, consisting of 4 students, 3 girls and 1 boy. The group sits in small circle with Mr. T and they begin discussing Chapter 20, which had been completed the previous day. The reading group discusses the chapter book they are reading, Louis Sachar's *A Crazy Mixed Up School*. Mr. T holds 4 books quietly and the students discuss the reasons that events occurred in the chapter that they read on the previous day. The students seem engaged, with the exception of one student who was absent on the previous day. Mr. T redirects attention to that student explaining to the others that they have to be more careful in their review of what they read the previous day as one of the students had missed the day. At this point, every student in the class is engaged. The aide works with one student who appears to be struggling with the revision of his main idea assignment. Mr. T explains what is going to happen next in the story, saying, "This is really neat!" and the student reaches eagerly for the book and turns to Chapter 21. One student begins reading aloud quietly and the other

three listen. The student who is reading aloud is the one who has been the most social and had to be isolated from other students previously. At the back of the classroom, the students illustrating a page from the bookwork on their drawings and the aide walks over to them quietly. Two high ability students continue to work on the computer, engaged and happy as they search the web for other rock stars. The aide finishes with the other student who moves quietly to the back of the classroom trying to get his teacher's attention. He is successful and Mr. T stops and tells him that he can get a piece of drawing paper and join the group at the back of the classroom. The reading group continues and the students take turns reading silently. In the meantime, the aide has moved to another student who is reading independently with her. She sits quietly beside her and she starts to read to her.

The reading group continues with students reading to Mr. T, but they are interrupted by a student who is a special education student (the same one who was observed earlier) as he wanders into the classroom and gravitates toward Mr. T. His aide apologizes to Mr. T as she gently redirects him toward the door. Mr. T tells her not to worry about it. "It happens," he says quietly and continues with the reading lesson. After every student has been able to read aloud for a few minutes, the group of four turns in different directions and moves quietly apart and they begin silent reading. The group of students in the back of the class continues to draw. A little boy who has finished reading silently moves to the outside of the circle and sits quietly watching as the other boys draw pictures of plants. Mr. T sits quietly next to one student and then another. As he moves from student to student, they stop reading to themselves and begin reading aloud and he helps them with any words that they cannot master. Mr. T sees the boy at the side of the circle who is not reading, quietly walks over to him, and offers a word of encouragement to engage him. The little boy looks very sad. The aide then enters the room again and passes the little boy two times. After the second time, she returns, bends down, and offers to help him with his paper. Mr. T pulls the reading group back together after they have been reading for 6 minutes and asks guiding questions about what they have read. The students are able to answer all the questions and are engaged and appear to be enjoying the book. They do not want to stop their silent reading time for the questions. In the meantime, the aide has walked to the back of the room and is quietly watching the boys who are drawing the plants. The little boy who has been alone and has not been working joins the group and watches what they are doing. He is directed back to his chair and watches quietly from his chair. Two girls who have complained about having to stop reading are allowed to continue reading. Other students stop and move to different places in the class. It is time for math class to begin, and another teacher moves into the room and writes *area* and *perimeter* on the blackboard. The 2 girls at the back of the room continue reading. The other high ability readers return to the class from the library where thy have been reading silently. They explain that they have been reading other books. When the math specialist comes in to do the math lesson, the class is ready to learn and seated quietly.

Writing instruction, observed over several visits, occurred in much the same manner as reading, with the exception of the use of grouping. During one lesson, the children are working on revising a story they have written; on another observation, they

are observed working on their own short books that they will illustrate. Each student is given a blank white book (8.5 by 11 inches) with a hard cover and approximately 15 pages. Mr. T began the class by reading from what he told the class was a very good example of student writing in a book completed by a third grader last year. The writing part of the Language Arts class is more informal than reading, as the whole class is given the same book assignment and instructed to break into a slightly wider spacing and students are moved to give them more space and quiet to write. They understand that they will be illustrating their books and pasting typed copy from their stories into each page that they will then illustrate. After receiving instructions about adding detail to setting and plot, they break apart into groups and begin writing and/or revising previous drafts.

Students walk quietly around and chat with each other. Mr. T is alone in the class with all of his 19 students and he works with a group of 4 students in the front of the class. Some students are much further ahead of others while some are at a very entry-level stage in writing. Throughout the rest of the hour of writing instruction, Mr. T works with small groups of children on the short books they are writing. Near the end of the class, 2 separate volunteers come into the classroom and indicate that they will help him as he works with individual students. About half the students get help and the rest work quietly and are on task for the majority of the class. Three student writing samples follow. (Corrections to grammatical errors and numerous spelling errors have been made so the story is understandable.) The first story entitled "The Crocodile Hunter and I" was written by an average achieving reader. The second story, "Cat's Birthday," was written by an above average student, one of the 4 girls in the highest reading group. Only minor spelling and grammar errors were found and these have been corrected for story clarity. The third story, "The Dirt Bike Race," was written by one of the lower achieving readers in the class who did not know how to spell his last name. His writing was impossible to decipher and he had to dictate most of what he had written so that it could be included.

Reading instruction for all students is characterized by the following practices:

1. Instructional grouping patterns enabling students to work in reading groups with other students at similar instructional levels.
2. Use of textbooks that differ by group to engage students.
3. Writing embedded in Language Arts Activities enabling students to connect topics and themes from trade books into writing.
4. Reading time that is assigned on a regular basis.

The Crocodile Hunter and I

Luke

I dedicate this book to my family

One sunny day I went to my grandfather's house.

I went by his swampy pond.

I saw a snake and I caught it like I was the Crocodile Hunter. I caught the snake by its tail without holding its mouth shut. You have to dodge from the snake's mouth and fangs if it tries to strike at you. Soon the snake will calm down.

The crocodile hunter and I are the only people in the world who can catch snakes like that.

I went back to my grandfather's house the next Tuesday and I saw a different snake and I caught that one too the same way I did before, but I dropped it.

I saw where it was hiding and I got it out by looking near the rock in the grass.

Then I went back to my house, and I looked for the snake at my house.

I could not find the snake and did not know where it was living but I saw the grass move by the herb garden and I think that was the snake.

I think it is a garter snake.

Garter snakes are black with yellow stripes on their sides.

The snakes I caught at my grandfather's house looked the same but they have black and brown diamonds on their sides.

Someday I want to go to Australia with the Crocodile Hunter and catch snakes and crocodiles with him.

Cat's Birthday
Jean

This book is dedicated to my Family

One day after school I went home and ate supper. After supper, Vanessa's mom called my mom and she asked my mom if I wanted to sleep over at Vanessa's house.

My mom came into my room and asked me if I wanted to sleep over at Vanessa's house, and I said yes. My mom said, "You had better start packing a bag for Vanessa's house."

So I packed the bag and then my dad drove me to Vanessa's house. I also brought my miniature backpack and put ten dollars in the little pack for the movie theater. We were going to see *Shrek* later in the afternoon.

Later that night Steven, Janet, who are Vanessa's parents, and Jonathon, her brother, watched the movie *Bless the Child* while Vanessa and I colored in a coloring book.

After we stopped coloring, we read a book. After we were done reading the book, we put our pajamas on and went to bed.

The next morning when I got up I woke up Vanessa because it was Vanessa's cousin's birthday. Her name is Cat and we were going to go to her party. So we had to get ready quickly.

After we were done getting ready we left to go to Chuck E. Cheese where the birthday party was going to be held. When Vanessa and Jonathon and her brother went inside, there was nobody in line but there were a lot of people there so Vanessa and Jonathon zoomed right through the line and got a stamp on their hands.

Then Vanessa and I took left over money from our little book bags which was $3.36 and we used our money to buy tokens from the token machine. When we got our tokens we went to the table to get a cup half way filled with tokens and a sticker puzzle.

After I was done with my sticker puzzle, I caught up with Cat, Vanessa, and Brittany. After we were done playing in the tunnels, we all had a piece of strawberry birthday cake with white frosting.

After we were done eating our cake, Vanessa and Cat and I went into the tunnels and tried to catch Cat. We caught her.

After that, we all did the choo choo train down the slide three times. Then we went into the ball pen for a little while.

Then Vanessa's mom called Vanessa and me over to her. She told us to get our shoes and socks on. The reason we had our shoes and socks off is that you have to be barefoot to go into the ball pen.

Then Vanessa, Jonathan and I walked to Janet's car and Janet drove me home. I had a great time at the party.

The End

The Dirt Bike Race
Rigo

Dedicated to my Family

RRROOM, RRROOM. I started my dirt bike engine.

I was starting a dirt bike race. My dirt bike started out. The race started.

I was in fourth place then I came up to first place. I had to pass three guys. I put on full speed and I passed them all to take the lead.

Then I went over a stump and crashed into a tree. I came in second place and I was sad. But there was a bigger problem. My dirt bike had crashed.

Four months later, I got a brand new Honda dirt bike. It was yellow and white and very shiny.

I saw those guys who I raced and I said I want to race. They said okay and so I raced them.

I came in first place and won. I was so happy. The guys who I raced against were sad in the end.

The End

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Talented readers have limited opportunities for both enrichment and acceleration in the classroom observed in this school. It is clear that because of the designation as one of the lowest achieving schools in the state, the faculty and staff have a mandate to increase test scores for students on the bottom first and next, special attention must be given to any student who does not meet the state goal for mastery. Above average students received no formal instruction in reading on any of the six visits to this third grade classroom. When questioned about this, the teacher sighed and said, "I try to get to them at least once or twice a week but I am not always able to do that. You see," he explained, "there are so many students so much below grade level that it is hard to justify not working with them. Many of them will be retained if they do not improve." The use of curriculum compacting and some attention to more appropriate novels for this higher group were observed but on most occasions, the 4 students (all girls, 2 White and 2 Hispanic) in the group are compacted out of reading, but left completely on their own to choose what to do. Guidance to select higher-level more challenging reading books was not provided. Neither was an in-class library where students could select challenging

books, as no books of appropriate levels of challenge for these students were noted in the classroom. The major accommodation used for these above grade level students was that talented readers were grouped together for instruction, and curriculum compacting was used. According to their teacher, a compacted version of the basal reader was used to have students master basic skills and for interaction with the literature in the program. However, during four different observations, no use of the basal program was observed. Rather, students were reading novels that seemed to be too easy for them.

No pullout services were provided to these students, either. The district gifted program indicates that a talent pool of approximately 6% of students is provided with pull-out services in which they work with an enrichment specialist for approximately 2-3 hours each week, but the enrichment teacher is only half-time in this school and the students that are in this classroom were not pulled out during any observation. In a subsequent interview, she explained that she does pull out the high ability readers for 2 hours each week, but rarely during the Language Arts block.

The third grade teacher indicated that he felt overwhelmed by the wide range of abilities in this classroom and knows that he should try to push students beyond the regular curriculum to a level that is appropriate for their ability level. However, he explained that when you have students who can read quietly from books at their grade level or pursue other independent work, it is hard to justify spending time with them when he has other children who read at a pre-primer level who cannot work independently.

Reading instruction for talented students in the classrooms observed is characterized by the following practices:

1. Instructional grouping patterns for reading enabling above average students to work in a group with other similar above average readers.
2. Compacting of reading material already mastered followed by some opportunity for independent reading and other self-selected work in reading class each day.

Summary

At the conclusion of several interviews with the principal and instructional consultant and several visits in the school, it appears that this reading program in this school is geared to "getting the scores up" and in particular, to move students at the below grade level of reading achievement up to grade level. Little attention is given to students who read above or well above grade level. It is interesting that this third grade classroom in a school that has so many academically low achieving children is left to the care of a first year teacher who readily admitted needing more help and not knowing how to challenge many of his students. Given that concern, however, it is clear that he has received help as the room was orderly, quiet, and learning was occurring on each visit. The reading program is supposed to combine both the basal reading program and the use

of novels that are appropriate for a wide range in the classroom, but it must be acknowledged that the basal series was not in use in six separate visits.

Talented readers in this urban school have some benefits, as they do not have to participate in reading instruction that is below their reading level. Rather, they rarely have any formal reading instruction because they "read well above grade level." Instead of having more challenging books assigned to them to which they could respond in a journal or have an opportunity for book chats or literature circles with their classroom teacher, they spend time on their own. Some surf the Internet, others check out of the classroom and read easy books for pleasure in the library. On one occasion, two of the talented readers were observed reading what appeared to be a slightly more challenging book; however, they read this book with no reaction from a teacher, no opportunity to have a discussion about what they were reading and little interaction with anyone at all. It appears that continuous progress in reading may not occur for talented readers in this classroom. And as the teacher explained, "What choice do I have? With this kind of a spread, perhaps 8 or 9 years, my moral obligation is to spend more time with the kids who read on first grade level or lower."

CHAPTER 5: Empire School

Sally M. Reis
Susannah Richards
E. Jean Gubbins

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**PK-4**
Student Population	**257**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**14%**
Black	**4%**
Hispanic	**4%**
White	**79%**
Non-English Home Language	**17%**
English Language Learners	**3%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**18%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

The majority of fourth grade students met the statewide reading and writing goals. In addition, over 95% participate in the statewide, criterion-referenced test. For the fall 1999 tests, 52% performed at or above the reading goal on the Degrees of Reading Power Test. In writing, 65% met the goal. In comparison to the fourth grade school district scores, Empire Elementary School was slightly below the percentage meeting statewide goals of 66%.

Introduction to Empire School

Empire School is a one-story brick elementary school serving students in kindergarten through fourth grade that has been a fixture in this rural town for the last 30 years. Upon entering the school, a sense of happiness exudes. The faculty and staff enter the office in the morning, and food is often available as they stop into the office to check their mailboxes. One morning, a large tray of chocolate dipped strawberries was available on the counter that holds notices and visitor sign-in sheets and on another day, a large bowl of oatmeal cookies awaited teachers. Most teachers helped themselves to a snack as they hurried off to their classrooms. On most days, the principal, NF, smiles at each faculty member and gives a warm greeting of welcome. A main hallway leads from the front door of the school to the main office. The gym is on the left side of the hallway, and on the right is a second hallway that leads off to the third and fourth grade wing. The first, second, and kindergarten classrooms are in a separate wing, coupled with several portable classrooms that have been added to one part of the back of the building. Four additional portable classrooms were added during the summer of 2001. Most classrooms are spacious and class size is small, with only 15-20 children in each class.

As school begins, children scatter through the hallways laden with backpacks, books, papers, lunch sacks, and other collections of odds and ends. On one warm spring day, some carry bouquets of perennial flowers, daisies, and peonies that they hand to their teachers. As the school day begins at 8:50 a.m., children shove their backpacks and lunches into lockers and hurry into their classrooms. Artwork, poetry, and short stories are visible throughout the school hung on the interior brick walls and the bulletin boards. This suburban school served primarily a White homogeneous population a few years ago, but that has been changed by an influx of a more diverse population. Students represent many cultures, including Indian, Asian, African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, and White. In 2 different classrooms observed almost a third of the students represented diverse cultural groups.

School Administration

The principal, NF, has been in the school for 6 years, and had previous experience as an instructional consultant in a larger school district in another part of the state. She is the only administrator in the school and a part-time reading consultant is in the school for 2 days per week. When the principal, NF, was initially interviewed at Empire School, she was shocked at what she found. The previous principal had been asked to resign due to numerous problems that had emerged in the 2 years he led the school. She indicated that faculty members were angry and despondent, parents were frustrated, and the superintendent was looking for someone with integrity and a good reputation that could "save" the school. NF was especially amazed at the lack of any curricular mapping or planning and immediately began to try to get the school back on track, starting with improving the environment and planning clear curriculum goals. In interviews with several faculty members, it became apparent that NF reflected calmness and consistency, and the faculty noted that improvements began immediately and had continued within the last few years.

This school has emerged as the most innovative in the district, according to teachers interviewed for this study who attributed these changes to NF's accomplishments. The school had been leased to a regional educational service center until 7 years ago, when it was re-opened because of crowding conditions at the other 2 elementary schools in the community. At that time, the principals of the other 2 elementary schools selected the teachers who would be transferred to this school and hard feelings arose that lingered still. Teachers in the district perceived that principals selected teachers who "were the weakest links" or the malcontents or on a more positive note, those who stood up for what they believed to be important in teaching.

Interviews with faculty indicated that NF has been a source of competence and quality. She is reported to know the curriculum, and during interviews was able to discuss every detail of the Language Arts program. She is well versed in special education and was, in fact, the substitute administrator for the Special Services Director in this district before she became principal. Her understanding of special education bolstered her commitment to meet the academic needs of every child. She indicated that she expected staff to differentiate to ensure continual progress for all children. When

asked how the needs of talented readers are addressed in the school, NF discussed several strategies that she encouraged staff to use. She explained:

> We have implemented cluster grouping, although I can't really talk about it very much because the other three principals are so completely committed to using heterogeneous grouping all of the time. But when I looked at our children and saw the wide range of ability in the students, I knew we had to do something to make this easier for classroom teachers. We use a grouping of five different categories: very high, high average, average, low average, and low. Our enrichment teacher worked with our teams of classroom teachers and identified students for placement in logical groups based on achievement and other issues such as learning styles. We were able to keep the range minimal. Most classes have a range of average to high or average to low and it works really well for our teachers because some are very good with high achievers and others with low achievers. We try to match the areas where teachers have talents to the areas in which students have needs, and it seems to be working.

School Library and the Library/Media Specialist

The library is a warm, inviting place that is filled with books. All types and colors and shapes of books are in abundance in every corner of the library. Colorful picture books are on display, and it is clear from observations that restocking is necessary because so many books are being used on a daily basis. The library is also filled with inviting corners for reading. This comfortable room has a row of windows on one side, and 3 walls that are covered with bookshelves. Plants are spread across shelves of bookcases. Large stuffed chairs are scattered throughout, as are other quiet spaces for reading. Students were observed in the library during each observation, suggesting that this library is used often.

A computer area with several computers is used by 2 teachers on the right side of the library as one enters. A large collection of videotapes is available, as is an extensive collection of non-fiction books. There appear to be many choices for both fiction and non-fiction for all ranges of student reading levels. The librarian is an aide who works in the library on a full-time basis, and she indicated her belief that many advanced books are available for students. She pointed with pride to several collections of classics and discussed her own children who had been advanced readers, indicating how this had influenced her interest in providing advanced options for high ability readers. It was clear that she loved books and was interested in spending additional time looking for material to support advanced readers.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The third grade classroom that was observed several times is a very pleasant environment and it appears that the children are happy to be there. A light colored rug in

what is known as "the reading area" breaks up a green linoleum floor. Ms. C, the third grade classroom teacher, is energetic and enthusiastic. She has been a teacher in this district for 4 years but has 10 years of teaching experience in another district. She laughs frequently and the children in her self-contained third grade classroom seem to adore her. During multiple observations, students brought her flowers, cards, and chocolate kisses, explaining that Ms. C loves chocolate. Her homeroom is small with only 15 children, and Ms. C explains that an effort has been made to keep the class size in the school to 15-17 children. Therefore, another third grade class was added after the third grade class sizes went up to 20 students per class a year earlier.

Desks are arranged in groups of three or four throughout the classroom. A line of windows covers the entire back wall of the classroom and on the shelf under the windows are bins of books all neatly categorized by topics such as biography, science fiction, oceans, and fiction. Approximately 275-300 books are available and the range is diverse: from slightly above grade level to well above grade level. A computer station is at the back of the room and five centers are spread around the various corners of the classroom including: author's arena (creative writing center), clever endeavors (technology corner), book nook (self-selected book choices), math maniacs (overhead projector, markers, papers, and activity sheets, and the discovery zone (paper, pens, and hands on materials such as glue, rulers, and blocks). The teacher's desk is against the windows on the back wall of the classroom. She has little desk space and there are piles of folders and books all over the desk. She never sat at the desk during multiple observations; but rather moved constantly around the room while working with groups of children. Children's artwork was arranged neatly on one side of the wall where the schedule for the day is posted on the black board.

On the back wall of the classroom were wooden student cubbies, a sink and a drinking fountain, as well as a small storage closet. A telephone was in the corner of the room but did not ring during class. An instructional aide entered quietly during the reading lesson to ask if any work needed to be done and Ms. C handed her a pile of papers that were to be added to students' writing folders. Examples of students' writing were added to portfolios several times throughout the year.

Ms. C was involved in a pilot of the new Houghton Mifflin Reading program that will be adopted next year due to positive feedback from teachers. In third grade, six themes are introduced and reinforced during the course of the year including: Off to Adventure, Celebrating Traditions, Incredible Stories, Animal Habitats, Voyagers, and Smart Solutions. Ms. C has worked with a fourth grade teacher and the 2 town librarians to create a database of book choices available from the local libraries, representing offshoots of the themes on four reading levels: On Level, Challenge, Easy, and Very Easy. She is proud of these efforts, which resulted in creating a 23-page database. There are 5 books categorized on each page, representing non-fiction and fiction suggestions to augment the basal program.

The daily Language Arts instruction began with the *Cast-a-Spell* program, which was also used at another elementary school involved in this study. Every child had a

white slate and a marker and Ms. C dictated a number of words from the *Cast-a-Spell* third grade curriculum. The program was implemented very differently than it was in the other elementary third grade classroom. In this class, Ms. C dictated words while students wrote them on the white slate. "Say and spell the word" is a phrase used consistently. Ms. C made the lesson fun and drew students' attention back to the task at hand. All students in the class were attentive and engaged in writing the words on their slate, including the following: Flag Day, install, installer, ecstatic, slurp, purple, burp, squirm, purpose. After dictating spelling words, she told the students that they were to write words from their previous science lesson. She asked them to write the first letter of the word for an animal that they studied that does not have a backbone. One of the children made a joke about vertebrats, and the teacher indicates that "vertebrats" are animals that do not behave. All of the children laughed and they continued to write the words on their white boards and then spell them aloud. They spelled mammals, reptiles, and then she asked them to write amphibians, and there was a pause. She asks children if they know the name of a tiny white frog that squeals very loudly, and she indicated that this was an amphibian. She asked for another word in the animal world and the children thought quietly. She used the word gills and then illustrated the word by explaining the difference between gills and lungs. The students say and spell the words (gills and lungs) aloud.

Next, she asked the children to turn their white boards around and explained they are going to do "muscle" words. The children looked as if they knew they would have to concentrate and then she said the words: always, every, does, different, each, every, their, there, here, hear, they're. She clearly specified that "they're" is the contraction and the students write it down. The 2 children at a nearby table write "their," and "there." Neither gets the contraction "they're" correct. Ms. C then explained that students should write the next "there," the place. The children said and spelled each word aloud and all returned to task. Every child participated and seemed to enjoy saying the words aloud. As the class spelled each word aloud, the children at the next table realized their mistake and corrected the words. The teacher also realized that some of the students made a mistake about the two words and went to the front of the class to write the three words ("their," "they're," and "there") on the board, explaining the differences and asking 3 students to use the words correctly in a sentence that they say aloud.

Following *Cast-a-Spell*, the class left for physical education and when they returned, they had a 10 minute snack period. Three students read pleasure books quietly, while others chatted quietly as the teacher prepared for the rest of the reading program. The whole class moved to the carpet on one side of the large classroom. Each student had the Houghton Mifflin third grade hard cover anthology book and Ms. C introduced the story to be read to the students by discussing vivid description. She told them they should read together, and then discuss what they believe will happen in the story. She asked the students why they think she spends so much time talking about vivid description. One girl raised her hand, and responded, "I think that the reason you ask us to notice vivid description is that when we read other writers who use vivid description well, we will be more likely to use vivid description in our own writing better." The teacher praised that response and then several other students offered suggestions, such as

"vivid description is even better than boring television." The students in the class spread out on the carpet, sprawling out in various positions. They sit and lie down and most students were on task immediately. The students opened their basal readers and began to read a book entitled *Poppa's New Pants* by Angela Shelf Medearis. This was from the fifth theme, Voyagers, and the students seemed eager to begin reading. After the initial discussion of vivid description, Ms. C discusses vivid description in the story they are reading. Students are asked to read two or three paragraphs each and continue to read singly or in paired reading groups in which 2 students read together. The students all seemed involved and none demonstrated off task behavior. The teacher interrupted the story a few times with humorous comments and the students smiled at her and seemed to be involved in what they were doing.

She explained that one of the major reasons that this school district has adopted this basal reading program is that they had previously used a whole language approach with trade books but had found that some of their students had not mastered basic skills in phonics and reading. This movement back to a balanced approach is incorporated into the Houghton Mifflin Series and trade books. This series was selected because of several components and most important to this teacher was the use of leveled trade books that can be purchased in small sets. These are optional and involve an additional expense but this district committed funds to purchase the leveled trade books. For example, for the theme Voyagers, four levels of trade books are suggested, including a range of reading: very easy (suggested titles: *The Golden Land* by Joseph Telushkin, *Iceberg Rescue,* by Sarah Amada); easy (*The Josefina Story Quilt* by Eleanor Coerr), on level *(A Child's Glacier Bay* by Kimberly Corral, with Hannah Corral); and challenge *(Balto and the Great Race* by Elizabeth Cody Kimmel). Other attractive features of this program, according to Ms. C, include: concepts maps on overheads, clear descriptions of skills, nice organization, audiotapes and selections, and summary masters.

After the period of reading aloud, students are asked to use a special type of tape to mark the page that the teacher has distributed to note examples of vivid writing and description in the classroom. She asks students to whisper their vivid description "pick" to a friend in case everyone does not have a chance to speak. Again, students are on task for the entire segment. One student gives the page number that she has found vivid description and then all students turn to the page. Then she asks students to predict which piece of writing is a vivid description. Students begin guessing which spot Clare has chosen for vivid description. The first student called on reads a vivid description and Clare says that is not her choice, but quietly adds that it is also a very good description. The lesson continues with some children telling the page they have chosen and other students trying to predict which description has been selected. Students used skimming and an attempt was made to involve students who are less actively participating. The teacher demonstrated the use of questioning skills to involve students.

Following the whole group lesson and the time set aside for reading instruction as a large group, the class was divided into small cluster instructional groups for additional reading work. All students were involved and reading quietly. Some read to themselves, some read aloud, others read to a partner, and a feeling of freedom existed in the

classroom. As the class is small, the teacher moved from one group to another on a more informal basis, rather than meeting with groups for a specified amount of time. She sat on the floor with a group of boys reading together. In one high group reading *Balto*, one student read aloud, one read to herself. At any given time, all students in the class were engaged and worked quietly. The highest reading group (6 students, 3 girls and 3 boys, 3 White, 1 Indian, 1 African American, and 1 Hispanic) read from a non-fiction book entitled *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* by Jennifer Armstrong and all students are working. They had a reading response journal open next to their books. Students in this highest reading group were engaged in a high level discussion about whether they would kill a living animal to survive if they were starving. Two girls discussed this and four other members of this group continued to work without being disturbed by the discussion. Three boys worked together and 1 girl worked quietly alone. The 3 boys who sat to the side engaged in the first off-task behavior noted during this class and the teacher immediately looked over and they returned to work. One boy read aloud and the average reading group was involved in reading *Charlotte's Web.* After a period of silent reading and quiet on-task discussion for 15 minutes, Ms. C directs the class to continue reading for another 15 minutes and to note sections of vivid reading to share later with the class.

In a subsequent interview, Ms. C indicated how pleased she was that the range of the class was limited so that she could provide appropriate instruction. She explained, with pride, that no students in the class were reading below grade level. "Some have jumped from 50 to 70 on the DRP," she reported proudly, and pointed to a list of scores showing gains in the Degrees of Reading Power test during the academic year. Continuing assessment appeared to be a major part of instruction in this class. Throughout the morning reading class of 2 hours, students were engaged and on task. They read quietly, and looked for vivid description in what they have read and several recorded these descriptions in their response journal. The teacher continued to move around the class reminding the students who were reading and not writing that they have a purpose in this assignment, to find excellent examples of vivid description.

At the front of the class, Ms. C wrote an organizer on a large piece of paper with the words: Vivid Description in red and below it the phrase: Eye Catching Details. She also listed: Hearing, Sight, Smell, Taste, Touch, and Feel. Students begin to read their selection of vivid writing, and categorized as smell, sight, or taste before they began to read. From *Balto*, for example, a student read a section on the dog sniffing the air for crisp smells and indicated that Ms. C can check the word smell on the board. Different children began to think about their descriptions and Ms. C used this moment to discuss the use of quotation marks. A young boy tried to decide what senses pertain to the description that he selected from *Charlotte's Web*, and he did not think it had any vivid description in it after he had heard other students' choices. Another boy came over to help and he agreed that there was no vivid description in the section that he selected. Ms. C used this time as a way of discussing how dialogue can often be less descriptive than prose. She concluded the reading lesson by summarizing what had happened in the reading class. She summarized the ways the students encountered vivid description in two different reading opportunities, the whole class and then in their reading group.

She finished the discussion about how they looked for vivid writing and then gave them a brief writing assignment. They were asked to write about a person eating an ice cream cone, and the person could be a stranger, a friend, or they could write about their own experiences eating an ice cream cone. The students were given paper and urged to use vivid description. By this time, (it had been almost 2 hours), students were ready for a change and moved back to their desks, picked up pencils, and began writing. The majority of the students in the class worked quietly. Ms. C reminded them to use hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch, and feel and several times during the next 15 minutes, the students glanced up at the board for reminders of vivid writing. The writing selections were supposed to be five or six sentences, and the writing assignment was supposed to be a challenge. Some students began to write immediately, while others thought about what they would write.

One student who was in the highest reading group wrote quickly and smiled as she thought of a phrase. Every child in the room was working on task except one who approached Ms. C and complained about a stomachache. Ms. C gave her a pass to go to the nurse, but indicated that she would have to return in a few minutes and finish the assignment during recess time if she was not sent home. The following brief writing samples were completed by a variety of third graders in the class:

> When I got the cone I could hear it crackling because it was so cold in my cone. Over my nose it looked like a giant sea of foam, dripping over the edge of the gooey cone. The smell of it was unbearable. The vanilla and hot fudge just seemed to open my mouth and bring the cone up to my mouth. It tasted better than something I can't describe, better than all the ice creams that you could ever imagine. It sent tingling sensations in my front teeth. Almost all of the other ice cream dripped down my face onto my shirt.
>
> My ice cream cone was dripping on me. It was gooey, slimy, sticky, but it tasted good! Cookie dough ice cream is my favorite! Suddenly I heard my ice cream say, "I'm melting. I'm melting. Get me of out the sun!" I was so scared I dropped it on the pavement. It was boiling like a pancake on a frying pan frying. I will always remember the talking ice cream.
>
> It was a sunny day. I was tasting vanilla ice cream. It was cold, creamy, and it looked yummy. All of a sudden I heard a faint call from my hand. Then it stopped. Then it started again. Then it stopped again. Then I looked at my ice cream. It had blue eyes and a mouth. It said, "Get me out of here!"
>
> I was watching my friend eat a ice cream cone. The gooey chocolate topping on top of caramel, with rainbow sprinkles inside of layer after layer after layer of vanilla ice cream. All in a superdy duper chocolate cone. I saw that most of it was on her face and only a little was in her belly. She told me that the taste was so rich and tasty. I could hear every lick she took. The smell of the ice cream was so tempting, I thought that I heard it say something about eating it.

> Chris couldn't wait to have ice cream and the sound of the swish as the ice cream got served. You could see the sun hitting the ice cream. It dripped down my tank-top and it felt so good. The rich taste filled my mouth the mint chocolate ice cream soothed my mouth. My mouth dipped in the hard cone crack. As I gobbled it up and nothing was left. Chris' mouth smelled like ice cream. His fingers were swamped with ice cream. I loved it.
>
> I could smell the creamy filling of the sweet ice cream. I could just about taste the vanilla chocolate ice cream cone. Ryan could hear the ice cream saying, "Don't eat me. I taste like chalk. Don't eat me or death will come your way." The ice cream said horrifying. Ryan couldn't breath down his throat felt like ice cube going down like razor blades but then Ryan put the ice cream in his dipper and left, and a few minutes later the ice cream said deafly [sic], "I'm melting. I'm melting and that was the vanilla chocolate talking ice cream.

Regular reading instruction in this classroom was characterized by the following practices:

1. Flexible instructional grouping patterns for reading and writing.
2. Direct instructional grouping patterns for reading and writing.
3. Independent reading in class each day.
4. Use of books at different instructional levels using the same theme.
5. Use of a classroom library with multiple books of various instructional levels.
6. A variety of different reading approaches on a daily basis designed to accommodate different styles of acquisition of reading skills.
7. Opportunities to select books of high interest from the classroom library and in the public library.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Talented readers had various opportunities for both enrichment and acceleration in the classrooms observed in this school. A concerted effort was made to provide differentiation for students in this third grade classroom, and above average students received some appropriately challenging instructional opportunities. The use of several strategies was observed, including cluster grouping, different instructional level books on the same theme, and various levels of questioning that stimulated discussions. Leveled novels and non-fiction books provided appropriate reading challenges. Guidance to select higher-level more challenging reading books was provided during observations. An in-class library where students could select from many books of appropriate levels of challenge was available in the classroom. The major accommodation used for these above grade level talented readers was cluster grouping across classes, grouping within classes for more appropriate instruction, and the use of more leveled books on the same theme for various reading levels.

Pullout services were provided to these students, as well. The district gifted program is based on a talent pool approach in which approximately 10% of students are provided with pull-out services with an enrichment specialist for approximately 2-3 hours each week, but the enrichment teacher is only half-time in this school and the identified talent pool students in this classroom were not pulled out during any observation.

In interviews after the observations, the third grade teacher indicated that she tries regularly to move advanced readers beyond the regular curriculum to a more appropriate level for their ability levels. She believes that she is able to meet the needs of these students in this classroom using the following strategies:

1. Instructional grouping patterns for both reading and writing, enabling talented students to work in a group that provides challenge.
2. Direct instruction at both the individual level within a group that is more advanced and complex than instruction for lower achieving students.
3. Questions at the highest level of complexity to accompany both reading and writing instruction.
4. Opportunities for some independent reading in class each day.
5. Leveled reading books at various instructional levels with the same theme that are a part of the Houghton Mifflin Basal Program.
6. Use of a classroom library with multiple books of above grade level instructional levels.
7. Opportunity to select books of various levels of challenge from the classroom library.

Summary

Talented readers in this school have opportunities. Cluster grouping provides evidence the use of differentiation in reading and the reading program seems to meet the needs of a wide variety of children. Teachers observed seem comfortable with different reading groups (within what seems to be a reasonable range) in their classrooms and the use of various types of assignments for all children. The adoption of Houghton Mifflin and the use of leveled books enhance some differentiated reading instruction for all students.

CHAPTER 6: James Madison School

Sally M. Reis
E. Jean Gubbins

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**K-5**
Student Population	**317**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**7%**
Black	**22%**
Hispanic	**27%**
White	**45%**
Non-English Home Language	**26%**
English Language Learners	**11%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**33%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Success in reading can be documented by the number of students who have reached mastery on the statewide assessment. The percentage of students who score at or above reading and writing goals are capable of completing tasks with little assistance from teachers. In reading, 47% of fourth grade students met the state goal, and, in writing, 39% achieved the goal set by educators throughout the state. Although these percentages represent improvements over the last 4 years, the percentage of students meeting these standards is lower than the district scores of 76% in reading and 70% in writing. In comparison to the statewide reading and writing assessment results (55.9% in reading and 54.1% in writing), the percentages of students from James Madison School that meet the state goals is also lower.

Introduction to James Madison School

Entering the front doors of the old brick building, the visitor is struck immediately by a sense of home and color. Throughout the hallways and the doorways that exit from the wide-open front of the school, flags from various countries indicate the school's commitment to global studies. Also, student products provide visible evidence of children's creativity and a faculty and administration with pride in their school. A feeling of order, cleanliness, cheer, and warmth emanates, and as children hurry down the hallway, they are smiling. On different visits, the same feeling permeates the hallways: that of happiness and enjoyment of learning.

From a distance, the skyscrapers in the nearby city with their glistening silver towers overlook neighborhoods whose buildings display graffiti-marred exteriors and weeds growing through the cracks of their asphalt grounds. James Madison is located on a main thoroughfare in an area classified as a transitional district in the Northeastern section of the United States. Transitional refers to the change that this school has made from a suburban district a decade ago to an urban district. Within the district are many

diverse groups of students in some schools and other schools that maintain populations that are primarily White.

The street on which the school is located stretches for miles into the downtown area of the city, crossing railroad tracks with run down stores nearby, and eventually leading to the surrounding historical neighborhoods that are still well preserved for tourists visiting this city. James Madison is a school nearest to the city, and the home of many of the urban students. Parents of these students try to find apartments over the border of the city, enabling their children to attend school in what has been widely acknowledged to be one of the finest school districts in the state. This reputation is deserved, as the schools in this district consistently produce some of the highest state numbers of students attending college, National Merit finalists, and semi-finalists, as well as students attending Ivy League colleges, and a remarkably productive group of artists, musicians, and creative writers.

Sections of the busy street near the school are lined with dilapidated two-story apartment buildings, gas stations, package stores, and bars. In stark contrast to these establishments, just blocks away are the stately Victorian buildings that were once the homes of the city's wealthiest citizens. These elaborate buildings now house the offices of many respected law firms and other professional establishments.

The James Madison School was established for many reasons. It is one of three magnet or theme schools in the district, and the others have themes based on technology, classical studies, and the arts. James Madison's geographic location has resulted in the highest enrollment of diverse students in the district. The use of the magnet theme (global studies and the implementation of gifted education pedagogy for more children) was regarded by the Central Administration and the Board of Education as one way to attract other students to the James Madison School.

The Mission of the James Madison School is visible on an electronic bulletin board as visitors enter the school and is a focal point of discussions with administrators and teachers. The mission statement is both ambitious and visionary, indicating that the school is committed to all students acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to reach their highest potential and become responsible, respectful caring members of a global society. It further states: "As a magnet school we will accomplish this by establishing high expectations, integrating gifted and talented strategies for all students, immersing students in other cultures and promoting home, school and community partnerships."

The school describes the goal of academic excellence in its brochure, explaining that academic excellence is for each student, with gifted and talented education as its signature piece. "Gifted programming strategies are integrated into the classroom, challenging all children to achieve their personal best." In explaining the use of gifted and talented education strategies for all children, the following broad spectrum of activities are highlighted:

- The basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics are integrated into all curricular areas. Students have an opportunity to apply these skills in real life settings.
- Children are challenged to think critically and creatively and to solve problems in all subject areas.
- Teachers ask questions at a variety of levels of difficulty to challenge all learners.
- Students use the latest technology to conduct interest-based, in-depth research studies related to the curriculum.
- Children create original projects, learning how to learn and becoming self-directed learners.
- Community resource people share their knowledge and expertise with students on topics that will enhance and enrich regular curriculum.
- A Gifted and Talented Education Specialist supports instruction and technology to enhance the curriculum.
- *Explorations: After School Adventures in Learning* and other enrichment programs provide academically challenging classes for interested students.

The community atmosphere is also a major component of the school in an attempt to be inclusive and respectful of the diversity of the population. The following are community goals of the school:

- Children are clustered in family groupings to provide opportunities for learning in multi-aged settings.
- The diverse talents of our student are celebrated and their needs are addressed.
- The Family Resource Center works closely with the school staff to sponsor family activities and facilitate home/school communication from birth to school age and beyond.
- The Community Resource Council coordinates the volunteer efforts for the entire school. Representatives from the Schoolwide Enrichment Team, P.T.A., Family Resource Center, and school staff form the membership of this group.
- Students benefit from 21st century technology through the computer lab and computers clustered in classrooms.
- The School Improvement Council provides a positive direction for all school activities and includes 25 teachers, parents, and community members.
- The use of curriculum differentiation and enrichment is a hallmark of the school, and the need to differentiate instruction for the diverse population in the school to enable all students to achieve and be challenged is considered to be essential.

School Administration

Much at James Madison has changed over the last 3 years, and the faculty indicates that most of the change is due to the arrival of the current principal. PB, the principal, shows great warmth for the children and the teachers around her. She has over 25 years of experience in education in multiple roles. She has a Master's degree in reading and a professional certificate in gifted and talented education as well as additional coursework for administrative certification. Prior to assuming this position in 1996, she had held multiple roles in education as a classroom teacher, a teacher in gifted education, a district consultant in gifted education and professional development, and a well-known consultant in strategies for differentiating curriculum for students of diverse abilities and in using enrichment strategies to enhance learning for all students. She is also the author of a book on the use of enrichment to provide quality curricular experiences for all students.

PB smiles readily, exudes confidence, and clearly has her finger on the pulse of what is happening in every classroom in the school. She rarely spends time in her office, and instead, is constantly in and out of every classroom and in all portable classrooms. As she explained the reading program, she was able to discuss every classroom teachers' implementation of differentiated reading strategies and provided examples of a wide number of programs. Binders and charts of schoolwide enrichment themes, test scores by classroom, and grade level are at her fingertips, and she is able to discuss every component of the curriculum and the assessment program.

She is extremely knowledgeable about curriculum and has an understanding of every curricular area and what has been accomplished to meet curricular objectives for each grade level. She has had a great deal of experience in curriculum mapping, differentiation, and enrichment and was able to provide examples of curriculum enrichment for each content area in large binders that she drew from a shelf in her office. The magnet theme of global studies is combined with the understanding the principal has of enrichment strategies, and she is able to explain how each classroom teacher enriches curriculum, while simultaneously addressing unique instructional needs of students at various levels of achievement. The school district has an enrichment program based on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model and the district enrichment coordinator works closely with the principal and the enrichment specialist in this school who is in the building half time. The combination of enrichment and differentiation is clear in every observation and conversation. The principal explained that a continued goal for her in the 4 years she has been principal has been the combination of staff development in curriculum differentiation and enrichment as applied to content areas across the theme global studies. The professional development has been especially critical. As applied to reading, this professional development has meant that every teacher learns how to group, how to compact, how to enrich, how to continue pretesting and using regular assessment strategies, and how to continually modify his/her own practices. Those teachers who have not wanted to join in the effort have been counseled out of the school and the principal now believes that the majority of the staff is a team working effectively toward a goal.

The principal, explained the goal of the reading program simply, "For each child, we try to see what makes sense for his/her unique reading needs." She is also particularly proud of the way they address individual reading styles and strategies, "Not every child reads in the same way or makes progress using the same strategies. We develop reading maps (with curriculum goals) and reading plans for each classroom. We provide many different strategies to try to support children who cannot read to learn in traditional ways. We also work hard to model reading throughout the day. Many of these children do not have models for reading regularly at home and so we must provide that role modeling opportunity for these students as well."

Curriculum Specialist

The schools in this district do not have assistant principals, as the Central Administration decided many years ago that these positions should focus on curriculum enhancement. JS, the curriculum specialist at James Madison was described by PB "an incredibly talented educator." Interviews with teachers and others in the school indicate that JS has many strengths. She has over 20 years of teaching experience, a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education and a wide range of experience in curriculum. The principal explained that although she is new to the school this academic year, she has a clear understanding of the needs of the students and the faculty. JS is the guiding force of the reading program this year, and she credits her wide range of experience to the district training she has received as well as the district reading supervisor. She explained her role as a resource to investigate and procure instructional materials to engage all students, and as a support person and curriculum resource for teachers. She has also supervised the management of all the volunteers and the instructional aides in the school. She has developed a management matrix that charts the adults and programs available in each classroom 5 days a week.

She explained that classroom libraries in each classroom are necessary because the instructional range is so wide in any one grade level. She explained how necessary it seems to be to have a resource person to help teachers get the additional materials they need.

> Once you exercise, your body seems to crave it. Teachers have gotten used to using alternate books as a resource. They will tell us, "I am doing a unit on space and I need additional materials or books." As a curriculum specialist, I will seek out and secure materials, or if our needs are more immediate, I will borrow from other schools and other curriculum specialists until the new materials arrive.

Because this school previously had the lowest state mastery scores in this district, the district office has provided additional resources. More adults come into and out of this school every day than any other school in the district. Some are volunteers and others are support staff hired by the school district. The principal believes that because of this influx of volunteers, the "biggest challenge is communication and organization." With the assistance of additional support staff hired with funds from the district central

office and the support of JS, flexible skill groups have been implemented in reading throughout the school and the maximum class size has been reduced to 22 in grades K-2, and 23 in grades 3-4.

School Library and the Library/Media Specialist

The library is beautiful and inviting and books are in use in every nook and corner of the attractive room. Approximately 11,000 books are available in this very appealing room. Two walls are painted a bright blue and one brick wall is on the left hand side of the room. A series of colorful jungle animals is painted on one wall. There is an indoor atrium that is visible one floor below on one side of the library that is open with a wall to protect students and as you look out over the wall, you can see the tops of live trees fluttering gently. Large plants line the top of several tables in the library and the entire area is conducive to encouraging reading.

A fulltime library/media specialist supervises all activity, and 2 volunteers were observed returning books to their proper places on the days in which observations were conducted. The media specialist loves her work and describes her book clubs and the way she searches for books to challenge readers of all levels. She has particular interests in challenging high-end readers and described the many ways she finds books that she knows will peak the interests of her most advanced readers.

The wide use of the library was obvious as a part of several observations. Classrooms of students are both scheduled regularly and drop in to use the library throughout the day, and it is clear that students are familiar with all parts of this room. Large shelves of books line the back wall of the classroom and seven large shelves hold books on both sides at various places throughout the room. Tables are scattered intermittently across the library and a computer station of 18 computers occupies the left side of the library. There are enough seats for at least one classroom grouping to be together for their scheduled time in the library. Across the back wall of the library are 2 offices and a resource room for special education students. Two lavatories are also available for students in the back of the library.

Large attractive displays of illustrated books are found throughout the library. A computer technology specialist, who works from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, offers weekly classes to classrooms of students. On observation days, several different classes were in attendance, including one of desktop publishing and one on Kid Pix.

Books are checked out regularly, and excited students discuss which books they will read next as they leave the library. According to the library/media specialist, efforts have been made in the last 3 years to expand offerings for all students. A wide range of books of various challenge levels is available and attractive inviting displays of books are noted in every direction.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The Reading Program at James Madison is diverse and multifaceted (see Figures 1 and 2). Because the school has had lower statewide assessment scores than other schools in the district, the principal has consistently lobbied for more resources to help the lowest achieving students; this is obvious in the number of adults seen in the hallways and classrooms. On every day in which visits were conducted, adults were present outside the classrooms in the hallway working with small groups. In fact, no whole group reading lessons were observed in any of the several visits made to the school over the last year, indicating the use of small flexible groups based on reading levels.

Sustained silent reading had been previously used by the administration, but in the current principal's opinion, too much time was spent on silent reading without instruction and students were free to choose the level of reading, resulting in little forward growth.

> Too often, students chose the easiest books that were already familiar to them, rather than selecting books that would help advance their reading levels. In addition, students at lower reading levels would make the same mistakes, reading to themselves silently, from lower level books and not understanding what or how they were reading incorrectly. (PB)

Currently, silent reading time has been replaced with strategies such as independent reading followed with student responses in their logs and frequent conferences with the classroom teacher or instructional assistants.

The Houghton Mifflin Literature Program is the core regular reading textbook that serves as the basis for the reading program (K-5). However, there are many additions to this program and enrichment opportunities are also available. As noted, there is an early intervention literacy program with several approaches for different grade levels. The core of the Early Intervention program is the breakdown of kindergarten into 10 groups that are divided among various personnel including the reading specialist, speech teacher, paraprofessional assigned to the kindergarten teachers, and two kindergarten teachers. The groups are formed based on students' achievement and reading levels, and unique needs are matched to the strengths of the adults working with them. The goal of each group is very clear: to improve chances that children will read on or above grade level in the future and to foster a love for reading and enjoyment of the reading process. Teachers are treated as professionals with the choice of which programs, strategies, and resources to choose for the students in their classes. Multiple reading strategies are used including tutorials and other strategies described below:

> Classroom Support
> Kindergarten-Paraprofessional in each room
> First Grade-One Paraprofessional for three classrooms
> Second Grade-One Paraprofessional for three classrooms
> Third Grade-One Paraprofessional for three classrooms
> Fourth and Fifth Grades-One Paraprofessional for six classrooms

<table>
<tr><th>Kindergarten</th><th>First</th><th>Second</th><th>Third</th><th>Fourth</th><th>Fifth</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Houghton Mifflin Literature Program (K-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Reading in the Content Areas/ Trade Books (K-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Early Literacy Program (K)</td><td rowspan="5">Early Intervention Program (1)</td><td>Phonics Tutorial</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Materials for Early Literacy
Literacy 2000
Ray's Readers
Pair-it Books</td><td colspan="4">Compensatory Education (2-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tutorials(K)</td><td colspan="4">Early Success Program (K-3)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Name Game
Letter Magic</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Classroom Leveled Libraries (K-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Scholastic Magazine (K-2)</td><td colspan="3">Time for Kids (3-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Reading Clubs/ Book Buddies (K-5)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="3">Junior Great Books (3-5)</td></tr>
</table>

Book Store-$1.00 a book (K-5)

<u>Extended Day Literacy Initiatives</u>

Explorations	**Enrichment Opportunity**	**K-5 All students encouraged**
Saturday Academy	**Reading/Love of Books**	**K-2 At risk**
Summer Academy	**Reading/Math Instruction**	**K-5 At risk**
Homework Center	**Instructional Support**	**K-5 Two students per class as needed**
REACH	**Summer Enrichment**	**K-5 All students**

<u>Townwide/Building assessments:</u>
Degrees of Reading Power
Reading Comprehension
Running Records

<u>Figure 1.</u> Reading program at James Madison School.

Reading Recovery. A full-time reading recovery teacher, a reading recovery intern, and two graduate interns pursuing degrees in reading work individually with students at risk. Their caseload is approximately 25 primary students, usually in first grade, who spend an hour or more with her daily several days each week. All students in this program score at the level where intensive intervention is recommended. They all receive this intervention until they are scoring at appropriate levels and then they are followed up and seen on an as-needed basis. Once students have achieved goal, they move back into their classroom for regular instruction unless they need additional support and help.
Paired Books. Pairs of fiction and non-fiction books are targeted for students at the lower end of achievement. For example, the small paperback book *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is paired with a non-fiction book about bears.
Literacy 2000 and Ray's Readers. These programs are small books that are provided for primary grade readers who are in need of support and intervention. Brief novels or chapter books with high interest topics are colorful and interesting and are given to support independent reading at the primary grade level for students in need of additional help. The Curriculum Specialist explains, "These sets of little books are both paperbacks, and short selections for low achieving readers, enabling them to experience success in reading and to provide them with a positive reading experience."
Pair-it Reading. In this strategy, fifth grade students are paired for long periods of time with students from first grade. The fifth grade student selects appropriate level and high interest books with the help and assistance of adults in both grade levels; he/she models the strategies the students have been taught through their teachers. They meet with their first grade partner periodically throughout the year to forge relationships and continue to encourage reading regularly and to increase the challenge level.
Classroom leveled libraries. Each classroom has a collection of books (numbering approximately 275-350) selected for high interest as well as differentiated reading levels. Color-coding marks books so that it is clear which are at grade level, below grade level, and above grade level. Children are encouraged to understand their current placement and strive to work to be better readers. While this may seem somewhat controversial, it was clear that children interviewed as a part of this study seemed very comfortable in their awareness of their independent reading level and ability to find just the right book. In addition, each was cheerful at explaining how hard he/she was working to move to a higher level of reading. The idea of multiple print resources is a clear, visible theme in every classroom in the school. Books and reading are everywhere, and different types of instruction are implemented in every classroom to attempt to address everyone's preferred style of learning.
Junior Great Books. Although not every teacher has received the entire training in Great Books, several teachers have had the full training and most teachers interviewed seem to understand how to use the questioning strategies that are a part of this program. The Junior Great Books Series was observed in use intermittently across the school.

Books for a Buck and the Birthday Reading Incentive. Grants written by the principal and faculty have resulted in crisp new books in a variety of genres that are available at any time for purchase for one dollar. Students of all socio-economic groups are able to purchase books regularly, and books are given away by teachers as incentives for work well done and for academic excellence. Each child in the school receives a gift certificate for his/her birthday, enabling him/her to get two new books. Students whose birthdays fall during the summer are provided with gift certificates that they use to select books for summer reading.
Reading Clubs. These programs are coordinated and carried out by both the Librarian/Media Specialist and the Curriculum Specialist. Targeted for both high and low reading achievers, these programs enable students of various levels at either end of the continuum to be grouped together to discuss books that are of appropriate levels of challenge. Both of these professionals spoke with pride about the satisfaction they have in working with small groups of students at both levels of achievement and described the types of books students read and the types of discussion they try to stimulate.
Time Magazine for Kids. Students receive *Time Magazine for Kids* regularly to augment their non-fiction reading and it is used both in the classroom and at home by students.
Scholastic Magazine. Primary grade students use this magazine to augment their non-fictional and fictional reading on a weekly basis. The students all seem to look forward to receiving this magazine and several immediately begin reading it as it is passed out.
Use of Technology for Readers. Technology is used only occasionally in classrooms observed and both the principal and the curriculum coordinator indicated that the increasing use of technology is a goal of the school in the future.

Figure 2. Sample of reading strategies and opportunities.

One Building Teaching Assistant
One Math Teaching Assistant
One Teaching Assistant due to Large Class Size
Early Intervention Reading Teacher
Early Intervention Reading Intern
Two Compensatory Education or Reading Teachers

Third Grade Language Arts Classroom

In an interview conducted after this observation with the third grade classroom teacher, she indicated that she used instructional grouping that is flexible and that she used a combination of direct instruction and independent writing or reading independently in class each day. She also explained that she was using 3 different books about Native Americans as a culmination to a unit on Native Americans. As a part of this unit, her students had several enrichment opportunities. In the classroom, the third grade

classroom teachers revamped the entire study of Native Americans, and they purchased historical fiction books and Native American non-fiction books to augment the unit. The teachers discussed major themes across various tribes, and they had a Great Trade Fair in which each student created a craft and traded with other tribes. They plotted materials across content areas and used math to plot journeys and decide what to take on the trip. The highest math group was working with the most complex journey.

When students were grouped by reading achievement, the teacher explained that the highest readers in the class are reading at the seventh grade reading level. Two boys in the grade are at the highest level. The teacher explained that she had provided training and support for the instructional aides in the classroom who used similar strategies and had help from the curriculum specialist and the principal in this effort.

The teacher also explained that students must read 20 minutes a night, and they must respond to what they have read in a reading response journal. These journals are checked periodically.

In a third grade classroom observed over three different visits, students were in several groups for instruction. Groupings are used for reading achievement and writing instruction and groupings change occasionally for reading and frequently for writing, depending on the skills and the focus on the writing instruction in any given class.

The classroom teacher, SS, is a veteran of 5 years of teaching in 2 different schools and this is her fourth year as a third grade teacher in this school. The third grade classroom is well organized and very bright and cheerful. Evidence of order and color is present in every nook of the classroom. Two rows of desks are on the right grouped together in a long row and 3 desks are grouped together on the other side of the classroom in rows on the left hand side of the classroom. On the right side of the classroom is a shelf that has a sink and water fountain installed and on the rest of the shelf are books and folders. A classroom library of approximately 375-450 color-coded books is available in the classroom and these codes represent various challenge levels or reading: above grade level, on grade level, and below grade level.

Three computers are in the back of the classroom in a technology corner, but only one computer is on and students do not use the computers during the observations. In a reading corner, pillows are arranged on the carpeted floor so that the teacher can sit on the floor with students and small groups of students can read quietly to each other. Materials are organized in colorful groupings around the room. On one side of the room, there are math bulletin boards mixed with reading displays, called word detectives, that ask questions such as: Is it a compound word? Is it a sound by syllable word? What are clues to identifying unfamiliar words? On the other side of the room, a bright colorful explanation of writer's workshop is prominently featured on the wall with the steps of prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing clearly delineated. On a nearby board the 3 words overheard consistently in the writing instruction are described. "A snapshot describes a person, place, or thing in great detail. A video describes an event

or action in great detail and a thought is a sentence or two that tells the reader what the main character is thinking."

A typical morning Language Arts block is 2 hours, with 1 hour devoted to writing and 1 hour to reading instruction. The class begins with 1 hour of writing in which third grade students are divided into several groups for feedback on responses to writing prompts. Groups for the beginning of the day are posted on the blackboard and students move quietly into their groups as the class begins. Twelve students leave the classroom for a technology class focusing on writing and another six leave for direct instruction for remedial work in writing. Throughout the morning, other students return to the classroom from other groups in which they have received special help. In the back of the classroom, in a small area surrounded by bookshelves, the classroom teacher sits on pillows with 2 students who are working on their writing prompts that have been returned by the teacher. She quietly explains the use of dialogue in a story, and focuses on the use of quotation marks. The 2 girls, who are Hispanic, smile with pleasure at the individual attention they are receiving from their teacher. They work diligently and are on task for the entire time they are observed.

The groupings change regularly throughout the morning. After 15 minutes spent by the teacher with just the 2 girls, 4 other students join the group having returned from intensive reading help. Three are Black and the fourth is Hispanic. They join the group with their teacher and are extremely attentive to the writing prompt suggestions being presented by the teacher. Other students in the classroom are extremely quiet. As the boys join the 2 girls with the teacher in the back of the room, they are told to get their writing prompts and that their teacher will be with them directly. They sit quietly and listen intently as their teacher finishes providing feedback to one of the girls. In the meantime, the other third grade girl has taken the corrections on her writing prompt and moved quietly to her desk where she begins the process of correcting the errors and adding the elaboration her teacher has suggested.

In another corner of the room, an adult who is a certified teacher working as an aide is with a group of 5 students. During the course of the lesson, 2 other students join the group that eventually has 7 students. Students begin reading their writing prompts aloud to the instructional aide who quietly helps them correct their writing. While one student reads his prompt aloud, other students are quietly working and correcting errors on their writing prompt. After he is finished, the aide quietly helps him and then each member of the group makes suggestions for improvement the teacher noted in the corrected copies that she returns to them. When one of the students begins to move off task, the instructional aide quietly redirects his attention to the work he must complete.

After 45 minutes, the group of 12 students who had been out of the classroom for technology instruction return. Again, movement into the classroom is orderly and quiet. Within 2 minutes, the students returning from their technology class are integrated into 2 groups for small group instruction on their writing prompts. The teacher explains that she has corrected all the prompts, using the state rubrics, and each child receives his/her writing sample. They quietly begin to read the corrections and ask questions of their

teacher or the instructional aide. The teacher has a new group of 5 students, 4 boys and 1 girl. The girl receives her prompt, reads it quietly, asks a few questions about how to change her writing, and immediately moves to another section of the classroom to begin work. The teacher meets with the 4 boys and directs each of them to begin working on the prompts. She raises questions that engage the boys and 3 boys listen intently to the questions, while 1 works on his corrections. "What is the snapshot you were trying to create?" "What does the cave smell like?" What does it feel like? Are the rocks slippery, hard, or sharp?" She then instructs one of the students with whom she has finished conferencing to go another section of the classroom to begin work. The teacher watches the 4 boys begin to work after spending time with each and directs each of them to begin working. She directly addresses 1 student, Andrew, and must ask him to go over to his seat and begin to work on his corrections.

At the same time, the other group is involved in the same type of correcting of writing prompts. (Sample writing prompts from 2 of the talented readers follow with the teachers' comments on the top of the sheet and corrections included.) At the other table, writing instruction continues in the same way. Andrew, one boy, goes to his seat and begins working on his corrections.

For the majority of the time devoted to writing, most students stay on task. When Andrew begins rocking on his chair and moving off task, SS immediately returns his attention to the task at hand. After meeting with about half of the class, the classroom teacher walks quietly around the classroom, stopping to encourage individual students who are revising their writing (and quietly keeping some on task). Groupings change regularly. In the group managed by the instructional aide, 6 students continue to work on their writing prompts. The aide moves quietly from one student to the other and every student is actively working on rewriting prompts and correcting errors. The group has 4 girls and 1 boy. Only 1 student is White and the others are Hispanic, Black, and Asian. Quiet and order characterize the group, and control is never an issue and neither is off-task behavior.

After an hour of writing instruction, the full class returns and an hour of reading instruction begins. Another adult, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, enters. She walks around the classroom, quietly checking on the students she assigned to work with her. She smiles and is inviting in her approach to them and 2 students leave the classroom for intensive instruction with her. Students are told they can have snacks and most get crackers and pretzels from their desks. Of the 22 students in the class, 20 are left and the remaining students take their reading books from their desks and are told to find their last reading assignment entitled Native Americans Comparison Chart. Listed down the side of a large matrix are the region and tribes including Northeast, Northwest, Plains, and Southwest tribes. Across the top of the matrix is land, shelter, transportation, crafts, tools, clothing, and food. Students begin working on the chart while eating their snacks. Another instructional aide enters the room and 3 groups are formed after a consultation with the teacher and the 2 aides. SS, is in the front of the room with a group of 5 students at a round orange semi-circular table with an open side for the teacher to sit in.

At the back of the room, the aide who has been in the classroom consistently, sits on the floor with a group of 9 students who all have a copy of *Night of the Full Moon* by Gloria Whelan. This group is sitting on the carpeted floor, and some of the students rest on pillows, while the others sit against bookshelves or desks. In this literature study segment of readers' workshop for below grade level readers, the aide begins to read aloud Chapter Six and asks all the students to follow along in their books. The students read the text silently, and all students except one have their books on the right page and follow the words as the aide reads the story. The aide directs the student who is not paying attention to pick up his book and he does. All students are now actively involved. As she finishes every two or three paragraphs, the aide stops and asks a question about the text. The questions are lively and engaging, and she consistently works to reengage students. After 20 minutes of reading, the students are asked to return to their seats and are asked to write about how the protagonist has changed from the beginning of the book to the current part they are reading. All students begin writing in their reading response journal. The use of the literature study enables students to develop a deeper understanding of meaning conveyed by the printed word.

SS works in the front of the class with another book entitled *Sees Behind Trees* by Michael Davis that is being used with a group of 4 boys and 2 girls. The book appears to be a more challenging reading book than the one used by either of the 2 other groups in the class. The classroom teacher writes a provocative question on a portable white board next to her. The question is: How did *Sees Behind Trees* change during the story? Give examples of specific events that changed his way of thinking. After about 15 minutes of discussing the book, SS directs the students to read 2 chapters after they return to their desks, and to answer the question in their response journals. They begin working and she then turns her attention to the 2 boys in the front of the classroom who are involved in paired reading. She chats quietly with them and one of the boys leaves the classroom for previously scheduled additional remedial help.

She smiles at the other student and calls him up to sit near her for one on one attention in reading. She provides encouragement and he sits quietly next to her. She tells him that she has heard him reading the book, but wants to discuss it with him. She asks some comprehension questions and then, as it is clear he understands the text, moves to more advanced level questions. Her questions include: At this point in the reading why would the character have done this, have you ever done that? How would you feel in that circumstance? The student is engaged and clearly enjoys the individual attention.

During this time, the group of more advanced readers that SS had previously worked with are sitting at their desks in different places in the room reading quietly. The teacher is providing individual instruction to one student at the front of the classroom. Other students who have been in the back of the room are continuing to work on the challenging writing assignment about the chapters she has just read aloud to them. Students are quiet and orderly. After 2 hours of reading instruction, another teacher enters the room and SS announces that math instruction is about to begin.

Regular reading instruction in this classroom is characterized by the following practices:

1. Flexible instructional grouping patterns for reading and writing.
2. Direct instruction at both the individual and the group level.
3. Independent writing or reading in class each day.
4. Tiered reading assignments with books at different instructional levels using the same theme.
5. Classroom library use of multiple books of various instructional levels.
6. Paired reading partners in class.
7. Variety of different reading approaches on a daily basis designed to accommodate different styles of acquisition of reading skills.
8. Enrichment opportunities, such as the use of enrichment to augment the Native American Unit.
9. Opportunity to select books of high interest from the classroom library.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Talented readers have multiple opportunities for both enrichment and acceleration in the classrooms observed. Above average students cluster around an in-class library and select books with green circles on their spines, explaining that these books have been brought into the classroom to challenge them and are at higher levels. They obviously understand this and are proud that they are reading at more advanced levels. Talented readers are grouped together for instruction, and curriculum compacting is used. A compacted version of the basal reader to master basic skills and for interaction with the literature in the program helps these students gain basic skills. A talent pool of approximately 6% of students is provided with pull-out services in which they work with an enrichment specialist for approximately 2-3 hours each week.

The third grade teacher indicated that she tries to push students beyond the regular curriculum to a level that is appropriate for their ability level so they can delve more deeply into the story. In a discussion with SS, the third grade teacher, she indicated that she tries to have her advanced readers consider the author's intent, and also the issues related to depth and complexity. She also said she tries to push them beyond what they have done in the past. SS explained that the more advanced books and supplemental class sets and the use of grouping in the classroom enables her to challenge her advanced students. She explained, "Money has been made available to purchase the additional materials suggested as the advanced books to accompany the Houghton Mifflin Series." She also explained that she uses many different strategies and tiered assignments using the same theme but varying the level of complexity or abstraction, and as a base, provides enrichment based on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. She stated that enrichment opportunities are provided to all students with differentiated opportunities for talented students.

Reading instruction for talented students in the classrooms observed is characterized by the following practices:

1. Instructional grouping patterns for both reading and writing enabling talented students to work in a group that provides challenge.
2. Direct instruction at both the individual and the group level that is more advanced and complex than instruction for lower achieving students.
3. Questions at the highest level of complexity to accompany both reading and writing instruction.
4. Independent writing or reading at advanced levels in class each day.
5. Tiered reading assignments with books at advanced instructional levels using the same theme and the use of advanced books to accompany the Houghton Mifflin Basal Program.
6. Use of a classroom library with multiple books of above grade level instructional levels.
7. Variety of different reading approaches, including curriculum compacting.
8. Enrichment opportunities, such as Great Books questioning strategies and materials.
9. Opportunity to select books of high challenge and interest from the classroom library.
10. Pull-out opportunities for the gifted program and the Book Clubs organized by the Librarian/Media Specialist.
11. Less formal instruction for some gifted readers and more opportunities for independent acquisition of reading skills.
12. Enrichment opportunities such as independent study and projects to augment the Native American Unit.

Summary

At the conclusion of several interviews with the principal and several visits in the school, it appears that this reading program had developed over the last few years and had taken tremendous amounts of work. The principal acknowledged, however, that the students were more and more needy every year and that more challenges were apparent every year, although she is confident that the majority of teachers are ready to accept the challenge. Her continued efforts at professional development have resulted in numerous changes in both curriculum and instruction. Partnerships with parents and home were regarded as an essential part of what she had tried to accomplish in the previous 3 years as well as the differentiation of curriculum and instruction. Talented readers in this school have a unique program with many different components. The reading program is not fixed; rather, it emerges and changes annually. All teachers observed seem comfortable with several different reading groups in their classrooms and the use of tiered reading assignments and different approaches for different groups of children. The integration of strategies often used with gifted and talented students seems to have enriched the Language Arts curriculum for all students and resulted in high levels of rich curriculum for everyone.

CHAPTER 7: North Corner Elementary School

Christine Briggs
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**Pre-K-6**
Student Population	**511**
Student Ethnicity:	
Black	**17%**
Hispanic	**78%**
White	**5%**
Non-English Home Language	**83%**
English Language Learners	**32%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**80%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Very modest increases in reading scores have been documented on the statewide assessment over the last 6 years, but this increase continues to be below acceptable levels for the district and state.

The school is presently working to maintain its accreditation because it has been identified as a low performance school. The majority of the present staff was hired in the past 6 years, and they face the possibility that the district may transfer them all to other schools if scores do not continue to improve.

Teachers continuously receive training in the initiatives prescribed by the district for test score improvement. Almost every week a group of teachers attends additional training while paraprofessionals cover their classes. The school is in the second year of implementing Success for All Reading (SFA) reading program. Numerous in-service training hours throughout the year are spent to improve teachers' delivery of this program.

The school's statewide assessment scores remain low and 90 minutes of test practice in math and reading are mandated in the daily schedule.

Introduction to North Corner Elementary School

North Corner is located near the business district of an urban area. Congestion, turn only lanes, highway entrance signs, and tall buildings surround the school that serves 511 students. The immediate vicinity also has older apartments, warehouses, and fenced parking lots. This area of the city was a Dutch settlement, with a fort built where 2 rivers merge and often flood. Dykes were built in the 1930s and 1940s to rectify this problem. A large factory building is located across the street from the school, although the manufacturing plant of the factory has relocated. This factory was an important business in the early settlement of the area and precipitated the first housing to be built for factory workers. Houses nearby were homes of the earliest the German immigrants who settled there.

North Corner was built in 1974 and the building resembles a two-story brown factory with only a few windows visible from the street. One could drive by this building and not realize that it was a school except for a glimpse of the park immediately behind the school. The parking lot is ample with a chain link fence surrounding it, and the entrance to the school faces the lot. A pair of steel doors are in the front of the building and remain locked except for the first and last 30 minutes of the day, so visitors are required to ring the bell to be admitted at any other time. There is a homeless shelter in the area, and shelter men are taken daily to nearby rural areas to cut wood to sell to support the shelter. This is one of the reasons that the school has a fence surrounding the school and parking lot. Another rationale for the fence was the gang activity in the area during 1992-1993. On one occasion in the near past there was a shooting outside this elementary school, causing a lock down until 5:00PM. The front doors remain locked during the day because there have been incidents in the district in which gang members entered elementary schools to attack rival gang members.

A large gym on the left and the auditorium on the right flank the entrance hall of the school. Two glass display cases adjacent to the front door showcase student created puppets and wooden sculptures created by the fifth grade art class. Lining the entrance walls are photographs of the recent Jr. Achievement representatives teaching selected classes about the world of business. One entire bulletin board is devoted to a winter scene highlighting the components of the SFA program in English and Spanish. A brick hallway leads to the open front office. The majority of this space houses 2 secretaries working behind a high counter covered with plants, and a parent information board and teachers' mailboxes line the 2 remaining walls. The front office has one of the few full-sized windows in the building, as the classrooms have only small windows providing indirect light or no windows at all.

This building was constructed during the open classroom era and was originally established as classrooms without walls. It has been renovated to create individual classrooms; however, 2 kindergarten classrooms on the first floor are still divided by bookshelves. In addition to the secretary's office space, the first floor includes the administrators' and nurse's offices, a teachers' lunchroom, a dentist's office, the cafeteria space in the center of the building, and classrooms tucked in around the edges. There are 4 stairwells, one in each corner and one elevator, painted with a seascape in the center of the cafeteria. The building is completely accessible for persons with disabilities, as ramps are also available throughout the school. The Special Education Program includes 15.5% of the students in the school. This includes students with learning disabilities, autism, behavior management, and multiple handicapped. The school has 20% of the staff who serve as paraprofessionals, and many assist the teachers full time to meet the special needs of these students.

The main first floor hall leading to classrooms is decorated with bulletin boards with information for teachers and 3 additional boards displaying Success for All (SFA) histograms for January 2001 (documented for the English and Spanish speakers), statewide assessment scores showing results of assessments and pictures of students, and teachers dressed as characters for Reading for Success Day.

The second floor center space is completely open. The library is open space defined by bookshelves instead of walls. Down a wide ramp on the opposite side of the library is the art room, also completely open. Tucked behind the art room is a tiny office space for the SFA coordinator, filled with reading program materials and assessment tools.

All upstairs classrooms branch off these two open spaces, and the different sections of the building surrounding this open space are divided into MIAs (multi-instructional areas), which are classrooms identified by letters and numbers. The classrooms are large; some have 2 entrances and levels. The furnishings are older but in relatively good repair, with some classrooms carpeted. The computer lab has been locked and not used during all visits to the school, but each classroom has at least one computer.

The classroom environment varies from teacher to teacher, but it appears that hidden storage space, in all classrooms, is minimal, and the majority of supplies are in full view. Information posters, writing steps, and reading comprehension graphic organizers cover most of the interior classroom walls. Chalkboards contain many SFA materials, leaving limited board space in many classrooms.

Student desks are in pairs or small groupings in all classrooms, giving the appearance of students working together. This is a requirement for the SFA programs as students are asked to think, pair, and share repeatedly during a lesson. Student work is displayed outside the classrooms, but because of the construction of the building, few people ever see this work. The building has a third floor, which houses a few special service classrooms, social worker's office, and teachers' work area with a copy machine, and the family resource center.

This school is one of four schools in the district that has been designated as a pilot enrichment academy. The schools were selected to begin a plan to provide diversified academic focus in schools across the district. This school was previously designated a Higher Order Thinking Skills School (HOTS), a magnet art theme. The prospect of teaching toward enrichment has many teachers encouraged yet cautious, as they understand that programs change continuously when immediate results are not achieved. While the prospect of enrichment academy may sound encouraging, the district administration has not supported the school's effort during this exploratory year, financially or instructionally.

School Administration

North Corner Elementary has a principal, assistant principal, and a SFA Reading coordinator. The main concern of the administration is the improvement of the school's state assessment scores. SFA is in the second year of implementation and its daily 90-minute time slot is non-negotiable. The entire school is focused on the reading program every morning.

The principal, with an advanced graduate degree in gifted and talented education, is aware of the benefits of enrichment teaching and learning and was initially enthusiastic about using enrichment as a vehicle to enhance achievement. The attitude of the principal has changed over the course of this school year, however. In September his attitude had greater receptivity and support for enrichment infusion into the school than at the present. Since the fall statewide assessment scores, which were low, his focus has been on other district mandates with enrichment learning as secondary. Teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the principal's leadership, and the appearance of minimal support of their efforts to provide extensions and enrichment for students.

The assistant principal does not support any enrichment programs, as her view is that students in this school need more drill in the areas of reading, math, and writing. She refuses to attend any staff meetings when information on enrichment is on the agenda. A small group of teachers are close to her, but the majority of the teachers seem unhappy with her attitude and leadership.

The reading coordinator has the challenging task of supporting the prescribed scripted reading program but has expressed interest in the possibility of incorporating enrichment if SFA elements remain unchanged. The majority of her day is spent on evaluating the progress of the students, providing additional instruction for students having difficulty with reading, and making available the necessary SFA materials. She attends meetings about once a week for SFA, taking her out of the building for at least half a day per week. The job requirements include long days, sometimes lasting until 7:00 PM. Every 8 weeks all students are tested to determine their improvement and placement for the next reading cycle. While the reading coordinator has two teachers who help with this task, the job of scheduling the classes and developing new class rosters is hers alone.

School Library and Library/Media Specialist

The library is located upstairs in an open space, with bookshelves taking the place of walls in the open-space library. The librarian/media specialist (who has a graduate degree in history) is new to the building, and indicates a commitment to improve the selection of books available for students. Presently, there are approximately 5,800 volumes in the library and 11% of the print volumes were purchased in the past 3 years. There are 11 print periodical subscriptions available in the library. There are 5 computers available in the library for student use, but the school does not have a functional satellite link and does not subscribe to an online periodical service. The majority of classrooms, the library, and the computer lab are not wired for video, voice, or data, with only 2% having any Internet access. The librarian also teaches a SFA reading class in the mornings, and uses tape to attach the required reading charts to the bookshelves.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The SFA reading program is scripted and a uniform schedule is maintained in all classes. Students are assessed to determine their reading level and placed into classes according to these results. Cross grade groupings are used to fill classes. For example a teacher may be teaching the 3.1 reading level class and have second to fifth grade students in a group. Every 8 weeks the students are reassessed; if they score above 84%, they move to the next level; if not, they remain. Teachers change the level they teach depending on these assessments and students could be with a different teacher and classmates every 8 weeks. SFA has developed materials to match the school's adopted basal. The materials used for instruction are the reading text, an occasional class novel, and a workbook that students cannot write in. The instructional schedule for the week, provided by SFA, is uniform throughout the building. On day one, every class begins with listening comprehension for 20 minutes. The skill focus for this time is pre-determined, but teachers can select the test to use with the students. During this time teachers read sections of the selection and ask comprehension questions. Students "think (individually)—pair (discuss with a partner)—share (volunteer to share answers with the group)." This format takes place throughout the building at the same time. Following listening comprehension is reading together time, which includes vocabulary introduction, story introduction, silent reading, and reading comprehension. This 55-minute daily block includes only 26 minutes per week of actual reading completed by the student. The remainder of the time is spent reviewing 20 vocabulary words per week from the story; constructing meaningful sentences, expanding sentences using one of the 5 chosen vocabulary words; answering the treasure hunt comprehension questions, and a 2-minute editing of a sentence completed by the whole class.

The conclusion of the class period, 15 minutes, provides some choice. It could include sustained silent reading, but during a dozen observations, this was observed only once with a group of fourth to sixth grade students who read at the seventh grade level. Additional skills instruction could also be provided, but this was never observed. Book Club activities are the most frequently used strategies. Book club provides time for the students to share books that they have read outside class. Students are to prepare a product to highlight their book. No system exists to ensure that the book is at the appropriate reading level for the student, and the development of the products shared varies greatly. Some students designed posters, dioramas, or puppets, while others just retold the story page by page. The listening audience has the opportunity to ask questions of the presenter, such as the following: Did you like the book? Would you recommend the book? Have you read any other books like it? These same questions were asked during observations in different classes, indicating the students have been instructed what to ask.

In the classrooms observed, teachers had books available on class shelves. The books were placed on the shelves haphazardly with no indication of topic, level, or interest. The majority of the books observed were on lower reading levels and topics for younger children. Interviews with teachers indicated that that they have gathered these

books on their own. Some teachers were observed highlighting books in the classroom on a particular topic, but these are for their homeroom class, not their reading class.

Third Grade Reading and Language Arts Classroom

A third grade reading classroom was observed that followed the SFA script. The 14 students in this class are all third graders who are reading at the 4.1 to 4.2 levels; they included: 10 girls and 4 boys (6 African American, 6 Latino, and 2 White—both from Bosnia). This classroom is small and serves as a special education resource room the remainder of the day. The walls are decorated with posters, large reading graphic organizers, and charts. The class library is limited, consisting of approximately 70 books chapter books on a tabletop carousel and 2 shelves of picture and some non-fiction books randomly placed and not leveled.

The teacher begins instruction by reading to the students from a *Goosebumps* book for the listening comprehension. Intermittently, the teacher pauses to ask oral comprehension questions for the students to think-pair-share. Initially, these included "Where are the characters? How did they get there?" The last question was, "Is this a nightmare?" The students discuss their responses to the questions.

The class has completed the work of the 8-week reading cycle 2 days early, so the teacher selects a novel for them to read until the classes change. The format of the class remains unchanged.

Following the listening comprehension lesson, the students work with the vocabulary of the novel. The words were chosen by the teacher, because this in not an SFA resource. If it were, these words would be pre-determined. The teacher selects only 14 words for this week, with primary focus on 5 words to be used for meaningful sentences later. The teachers read the words and their meanings aloud, then lead the students through the list — teachers read a word and the students repeat the word.

During one observation, the students were supposed to make predictions about the story, but the class had already begun to read the book so the teacher substituted a story map activity. This is an unusual case, as the teacher explained; it is only because these students are doing an additional novel that this sort of diversion can occur. Teachers are required to post outside their classroom the lesson they are teaching each day, the story being used — including page numbers, and the skill focus for the day. Students proceeded to begin to work on the story map as teams. SFA students work in teams. They name their team on the first day of the reading cycle and work together to earn points each class session. Points are rewarded for working together, following directions, and making smooth transitions between activities. The students were exhibiting difficulty in remembering the story well enough to complete the story map, so they were instructed to reread the passage to find their answers, treasure hunt process. The teacher, who is the Special Education resource teacher the remainder of the day, sets a timer for the students as they begin to reread. He shares that this has a calming, rhythmic effect on the students.

The teacher explained that a few of these students do better work in the afternoon than in the morning, as they are more attentive and focused. Others work better in the morning, and this became evident when all the SFA classes were moved to the afternoon for several days because of statewide assessment practice testing. He also explained that these students love to read and they are concerned about their own progress, competing against the assignment. The schedule changes; silent reading is over and paired reading must begin. Teachers in this program are continuously watching the clock to remain on schedule. This teacher did alter the schedule by waiting until the majority of the students completed their individual silent reading.

During paired reading, students have assigned reading partners in their teams. Chairs are placed in a standard way, left side of one student next to the right side of the other, like an antique gossip couch. Students take turns reading the passage aloud. For those with partners who did not complete the individual reading, the paired readers begin where the student stopped. Discussion with partners about content follows paired reading.

The teacher explained that students at this level like the structure and are learning how to discuss with a group as a result. He also shared an example of one student who had been absent for 6 weeks because she had gone to Puerto Rico. When she returned, she took the 8-week reassessment and moved up in the program.

The class has two activities to complete before dismissal, 2-minute edit and book club. These are bright students who know the routine and they complete the edit process with no problem and listen to one book club speaker, who rereads the book to the class. The teacher has made adaptations for the students who demonstrate off task behaviors, and believes this increased some students' level of productivity. The trouble is that these students, based on the testing and numbers, may be moved to different teachers for their next level. The students' support structure vanishes, off task behaviors increase, and productive learning decreases.

The only writing that occurs during reading is the construction of meaningful sentences, answering reading comprehension questions, and editing a sentence as a class. The district has instituted a writing program in the afternoon with the student's homeroom teacher. Since the reading teacher is probably not the homeroom teacher, connections between reading and writing do not exist. Reading instruction is concluded when the music is heard over the loud speaker, regardless of what is happening in class—providing limited to little closure/reflection for the lesson.

Reading instruction for all students is characterized by the following practices:

1. Direct instruction.
2. Instructional grouping between classes.
3. Strict time schedule for reading lesson components.
4. Daily homework to read 20 minutes per night in choice book.
5. Think-Pair-Share thinking strategy.

6. Student presentation of choice books.
7. Teacher reads aloud.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Students who are reading above grade level are placed in SFA classrooms that are teaching at that higher grade level. No modifications are made in the schedule, providing choice in reading, or change in skills. In an observation of a group who tested at the seventh grade reading level, fourth to sixth grade homerooms, the format and activities remained exactly the same as all the other classes. For example, the teacher did read and facilitate more probing questions in listening comprehension, "Why are kids who do well in class called losers?" And, "Why are kids who don't do well in class called losers?" He followed up with "Who are the winners?" The students were still using the Think-Pair-Share strategy and gaining points for their team. The classroom environment was somewhat more relaxed than in the other classrooms. Students were permitted to move to alternative places in the room to do their silent reading; some chose to sit on the floor or away from the group. While these students did receive some minor modifications, all of their instruction was the same, and no differentiation within the instructional structure was provided for individual students who displayed advanced abilities in reading.

Reading instruction for talented students in the classrooms observed is characterized by the following practices:

1. Direct instruction.
2. Instructional grouping between classes.
3. Strict time schedule for reading lesson components.
4. Daily homework to read 20 minutes per night in choice book.
5. Think-Pair-Share thinking strategy.
6. Student presentation of choice books.
7. Teacher reads aloud.
8. Novels as supplementary readers.

Summary

The reading instruction at this school demonstrates only one level of differentiation: group placement based test scores. Classes consist of two reading levels due to numbers and the instruction is not altered. The focus of instruction does not provide students with very much time to read in school and any choice reading takes place outside of school.

CHAPTER 8: Nutmeg Center Elementary School

Christine Briggs
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**Pre-K-6**
Student Population	**530**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**2%**
Black	**52%**
Hispanic	**34%**
White	**13%**
Non-English Home Language	**38%**
English Language Learners	**12%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**47%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

On the statewide assessment there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of students meeting the state goal in reading and writing scores in grades 4 and 6. The percentage of students who reached the state goal in fourth grade was 26% in reading, and in writing 9% met the state goal on the fall 1999 assessment. In sixth grade, 53% in reading and 57% in writing met the state goal. All scores were below the state percentage for students at or above the state goal.

Introduction to Nutmeg Center Elementary School

Nutmeg Center is situated in a neighborhood of well-maintained, vintage homes in a large urban city. Immediately surrounding the school building, the homes have remained single-family occupancy, but on adjacent streets many of the homes have been sub-divided into multi-family homes. The original school structure aesthetically fits with the surrounding area; a façade of the building is a combination of wood and mortar with windows all along the structure. The entrance is a porch that is enclosed on three sides by the front door and sidewalls. The flooring in the entry is tile and the front doors in the center of the building are massive, wooden, and have paned windows. To gain entrance to the school at times other than arrival and dismissal, there is a bell requiring the security officer, who is located just inside the front hallway or the front office, to release the latch. Sidewalks surround the entire campus because the majority of the students live within walking distance to campus. Congestion at arrival and dismissal is constant because of the lack of adequate parking, and the side streets are continuously lined with cars. As so many families live close to the school, parents drop or pick up their children on the way to work or errands, and in particular, parking and traffic problems occur on restricted parking days. To help alleviate this problem, the playground in the rear of the original building becomes a parking lot and the neighboring church shares its parking lot with the school.

Inside the front door, and up a small set of stairs, is a spacious front hall with light pine floors. At the top of the stairs, on either side of the doorway, are 2 large display cases that are old and painted green. The school library, also located at the top of the stairs, houses a new library media specialist, who was a welcome addition to the faculty. The library shelves contain fewer books than one would expect from a school serving 520 students. The library does not have a warm, inviting feel that beckons students to come in and browse, but rather a sterile and lackluster feeling pervades as the walls are void of art or posters promoting reading. Materials are piled in no apparent order and are inaccessible to the students. On several observations, tables are stacked with information for faculty work or special education reviews.

Outside of the library is the Success for All (SFA) Café used for students who are recommended by their reading teachers to have their lunch and receive a special dessert, due to their reading progress. Across from the SFA Café is the front office, a very small space that serves as the hub of the school. Two secretaries work behind a large counter and the conversation pace of both secretaries and teachers asking for information is always hurried. Different questions are answered simultaneously and physical movements of staff and administration are rapid and sometimes appear frantic. The principal's office, adjacent to this commotion, has a conference table and a series of flat surfaces around the room that hold a sea of papers and important documents. The principal seldom remains in his office, as he is usually in the building supervising. He speaks quickly and maintains a quick pace, often running from classroom to classroom. He uses his walkie-talkie frequently to keep in contact with the front office, the security guard, or anyone else he needs to reach. On one occasion, while meeting with a team of teachers and the principal, a teacher glanced out the window and saw students throwing snowballs at each other. The principal immediately used the walkie-talkie to call the security guard who was told to bring the students to the principal. There is a policy that no snow is thrown and when the students arrived, his demeanor and the directness of his voice informed the students that their behavior was unacceptable. Students do not seem afraid of him but he does command respect, especially when it concerns the wellness of the school.

The additions to the original building sprawl over a city block, and traveling from the original building to the two connected additions presents a challenge. The gym is one addition that was restored from a dilapidated old wreck to an historical representation of a time gone by. One example of this is the wooden spectator seats in the balcony of the gym that were refurbished and padded instead of replaced. This decision honored the past without having to sacrifice seating if new, larger seats were added. The principal was instrumental in this project and is proud of the results.

School Administration

Nutmeg Center Elementary School has a principal, assistant principal, SFA reading coordinator, and a library/media specialist. The school has a focus to improve scores on the state assessment and professional development for teachers throughout the year. The principal (FB) is open to addressing the needs of high ability students, but the

pressure on test accountability takes most of his time and energy. He undertakes multiple tasks and entrusts decisions to specific teachers. He does not relinquish his authority, but seems to empower his staff with the understanding that he should be informed and maintains the final veto power. He had been a principal in previous years and left to work at a regional service center, but he did not think he was making a difference there and became a principal again. He reflects confidence and leadership skills in the decisions he has made.

The assistant principal is in his first year at the school, but he was in the district for 10 years, serving as a middle school English teacher and assistant principal. He was a mentor to several students who won writing competitions, and national and district awards. The winners received partial scholarships and money for their works, and he is very proud of his students' accomplishments in writing. He is bilingual (Spanish) and worked as an assistant principal in another elementary school last year. The district chose to shuffle administrators to place some special education administrators in assistant principal positions. It was through these administrative changes that he came to Nutmeg Center. Nutmeg Center does not have a bilingual Spanish program, but does offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. The second language learners are mostly from Eastern Europe, Central America, and Mexico.

The SFA reading coordinator was never available for individual interviews. During dozens of visits to the school, she was out of the building attending conferences, district meetings, or meetings in the school.

The librarian/media specialist is new to the building, as the previous librarian left earlier in the year. This librarian is determined to organize materials for better usage. A limited number of books are available when compared to the size of the school population (11.3 volumes per student, 5,989 volumes in total, and 32.5% of the print volumes were purchased over the past 3 years. The library subscribes to 10 print periodicals and has 120 non-print materials available. The school has 100% Internet access with 8.7 students per computer and 75% of the computers have high or moderate power. The school does not have a functional satellite link and does not subscribe to an online periodical service. The library shelves are not full and the librarian indicated the need for additional resources for the students.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The school is using a scripted reading program, SFA, and is in the second year of implementation. Reading instruction takes place every morning for 90 minutes. Every teacher in the building teaches reading during this 90-minute block. Students are assessed to determine their instructional reading level. Based on these assessments, students are grouped by reading level (i.e., 3.1—first semester—grade three). Students are assigned to homogeneously grouped classes by these levels and assigned to a reading teacher. Their reading teacher is not necessarily their homeroom teacher, reducing any follow-up in reading that could occur later in the day. The entire student population

moves at a specified time for reading instruction and remain in these groups for 8 weeks, after which they are assessed to measure improvement and are reassigned to a reading class based on these assessments. Classes can be multiage depending on the number of students in a particular level of reading instruction. A teacher may only remain with this group of students for one, 8-week period. Teachers' assignments for reading instruction can change every 8 weeks, depending on the assessment results. The schedule for the week is the same for all levels and includes the following:

Instruction—Day 1 and 2

- Listening comprehension—20 minutes—Teacher reads short portions of a story aloud, pausing periodically to ask students comprehension questions. Students "think (individually)—pair (discuss with a partner)—share (volunteer to share answers with the group)." The teacher chooses the reading selection.
- Vocabulary introduction—10 minutes—20 words are chosen for the week from the students' assigned reading text. These words are read and defined orally by the teacher followed by teacher/student alternating reading of the list. The follow-up activity to this requires the students to create well-developed sentences for 5 designated words. This activity is referred to as meaningful sentences.
- Silent reading/partner reading/comprehension questions (treasure hunt)—35 minutes—the assigned reading selection for the week must be read in the first 2 days of the week. Students read silently for 10 minutes, partners read for 5 minutes, work individually on comprehension questions (treasure hunt) for 10 minutes, discuss their answers with their partner for 5 minutes, and write their response to the questions on a graphic organizer for 5 minutes.
- Two-minute edit—5 minutes—Students review a teacher-developed sentence on the board, containing mechanical errors. Students review the sentence and the class orally corrects the errors.
- Book club, sustained silent reading, or additional skills instruction—15 minutes—The remainder of the instructional period is designated for one of these activities. Book club asks students to share books read outside of class, orally with a visual representation (i.e., diorama). The book club component was seen most often, students seemed to enjoy this activity. Students are assigned to presentation days, approximately 3 students present each day.

Days 3 and 4 replace the reading portion of the lesson (35 minutes) with a review of the treasure hunt questions and a writing activity related to the completed questions and the text. Students are given a vocabulary test on day 3 and a story test on day 4.

Day 5 replaces the vocabulary work and the reading portion of the lesson with assessments of story comprehension and meaningful sentence production. There is time assigned for revision of the writing activity from days 3 & 4.

During the week, the students are assigned for 26 minutes of in class reading time. The district's adopted basal is used as the reading text with the SFA prepared materials. The remainder of the instructional time involves reviewing vocabulary from the assigned story, creating meaningful sentences elaborating sentences using the new vocabulary, responding to treasure hunt questions, recalling facts from the story, and completing whole class edits of one sentence each day. With the exception of listening comprehension and book club time, students work in teams with tablemates. These teams are to help build collaboration between the students and serve as a management tool. Teams earn points for working well together, supporting each other, and completing assigned tasks in an orderly manner. These points do not yield anything for the students except that their team earns a high number of points during reading class.

In the classrooms observed, teachers have made books available on their shelves to check out. The majority of the books on the shelves are fiction and most are at lower reading levels. Class libraries ranged from approximately 100 to 300 books, generally paperback novels. Difficulties exist as these books also serve the teachers homeroom class, are not leveled for reading ability, and are limited in variety of topics. Teachers interviewed indicated that they gathered these books using their own money. In one classroom, the teacher was observed with non-fiction books from the public library to provide students with additional information about spiders during their reading of *Charlotte's Web*. These students learned about different types of spiders, how webs were constructed, and deviated from the set SFA curriculum. This was not a common occurrence in other classrooms observed.

Third Grade Reading Classroom

A third grade level reading class was observed several times and the SFA program format was consistent across each observation. The teacher did make adjustments based on her students and her previous primary teaching experiences. Her classroom design included resources in centers or stations around the room, numerous art projects, and SFA worksheets suspended from the ceiling. Two computers were in the back corner of the room, but they were never observed being used by students. General classroom materials were stored in tubs and were visible because of limited storage and closet space.

On one observation, instruction followed the day 2 program instruction cycle. The required sign posted outside of the classroom indicated the day and number of the lesson, listening comprehension skill, story title for the week, and story comprehension skill. The instructional level for this class is third grade level, but the class consists of mostly fourth grade students reading below grade level. There are 18 students, 10 girls and 8 boys (12 African American, 4 Hispanic, 2 White). This lesson begins with listening comprehension. Students are seated on a small, carpeted area of the classroom while the teacher reads a story and asks factual comprehension questions. SFA recommends using a carpeted area and an upholstered chair to establish a warm, comfortable environment. During listening comprehension, the teacher reads a short portion of a chosen text and asks questions for 20 minutes. On one occasion, the teacher

broke from the instructional script to provide a connection between students and the listening comprehension text. She asked the children who had been to the beach, explained how lying in the sun is relaxing, and appeared to connect the students to the story characters. This diversion from the script seemed to clarify for the students the events of the text. She also encouraged students to make comments during the reading of the text, which connects the story content with their lives. SFA is a sequenced, paced program. However the time used to make these connections did not change the pace of the lesson. The teacher artfully incorporated student comments into the lesson. Students responded to oral comprehension questions using Think-Pair-Share strategy and made predictions about the story.

After 20 minutes of listening comprehension was completed, the lesson transitioned to working on vocabulary and creating meaningful sentences. Students moved from the carpeted area to their desk assignments. During this transition students are reminded that their team could earn points for demonstrating active listening, explaining their ideas when giving answers, having their homework out on their desks, and helping and encouraging their team members. There are 5 teams in this classroom, with a mix of boys and girls on each team. The teacher begins her vocabulary/meaningful sentence construction lesson by reading aloud the 20 vocabulary words and definitions selected for this week. These words are from the assigned student reading text. The teacher reads each word and the students echo back the word. After the oral recitation of the vocabulary, the next activity is to have students create well-developed sentences (meaningful sentences) for 5 of this week's words. This activity usually takes place daily. This teacher modified this procedure for her students. She explained during later interviews that she found using a graphic organizer (a paper with boxes for students to record the who, where, and why for their sentences) supported the students' sentence development efforts. Each team was given one graphic organizer with 1 of the 5 words. Each team was given 2 minutes to write down ideas for each element on the graphic organizer. At the end of 2 minutes, papers were exchanged, and the process was repeated until every team worked on all 5 words. This class completes their meaningful sentences by day 3. The SFA program assigns time everyday for this, using different time blocks each day. This teacher found that her students needed to have closure for the assignment and working for longer periods of time on 2 days served them better, producing 5 well-formed sentences.

After sentence creation, time was provided to do reading comprehension questions, "treasure hunt." This activity occurs throughout the week. The class orally reviewed the questions they completed the day before and were given their silent/partner reading assignment (p. 158 to the end of the story, approximately 10 pages). SFA is designed for the students to read their assigned story in 26 minutes total over a few days. Students have limited opportunity to read in reading class in their 7.5 hours of weekly instruction. The program focuses on pre-requisite skills rather independent reading time. After about 10 minutes of individual, silent reading, students move their chairs to work with their partner, right side of one child next to left side of the other facing opposite directions. Students take turns reading portions of the story aloud to their partner, followed by working on their treasure hunt questions.

For the closure of the lesson, the students gathered again on the carpeted area for 15 minutes of book club. Students shared a self-selected book with the class through oral and visual representations. During one visit, a student shared a book entitled *I Spy*. This book had a few sentences on each page with objects hidden in the illustration and the goal involved finding the object addressed in the text. The class ended with the sound of the bell, all the students lined up to return to their homerooms while the teacher distributed their homework paper.

Reading instruction for all students is characterized by the following practices:

1. Direct instruction.
2. Instructional grouping between classes.
3. Strict time schedule for reading lesson components.
4. Daily homework to read 20 minutes per night in choice book.
5. Think-Pair-Share thinking strategy.
6. Student presentation of choice books.
7. Teacher reads aloud.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

The instruction for talented readers differs only by the level of reading class they attend (i.e., fourth grade student attends a sixth grade level reading class). Two fourth graders were observed during their level 6 SFA class. These 2 girls are reading two grade levels above their peers, and the procedures and materials used for reading vary in only one way. In the higher grades, teachers may have a collection of designated novels instead of the reading textbook for students reading at or above grade level. These novels are leveled, but all students read the same novel.

The SFA daily routine of activities otherwise remains unchanged. The vocabulary words used for vocabulary development and sentence construction are more advanced, but no other alteration was observed. These students complete all required activities in a SFA reading lesson. This format is engrained in the students; 2 talented readers were able to repeat the exact phrases their teacher uses for each activity. So while high ability readers are grouped with older students reading at grade level, their instructional experiences remain standardized.

Reading instruction for talented students in the classrooms observed is characterized by the following practices:

1. Direct instruction.
2. Instructional grouping between classes.
3. Strict time schedule for reading lesson components.
4. Daily homework to read 20 minutes per night in choice book.
5. Think-Pair-Share thinking strategy.
6. Student presentation of choice books.

7. Teacher reads aloud.
8. Novels as supplementary readers.

Summary

Reading instruction at this school demonstrates only one level of differentiation for talented readers, level placement in the reading program. This grouping strategy began when the SFA reading program was implemented. Within that placement, all readers read the same book and do all of the same activities. Classes may have combined reading levels because of the number of students (3.1 and 3.2 may be taught in one classroom), but the instruction is uniform. With the limited time allotted for reading itself during class, the students only additional reading time with books of their own selection is at home, by themselves.

CHAPTER 9: Roosevelt Public School

Joan Jacobs
Christine Briggs
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**5-8**
Student Population	**1,037**
Student Ethnicity:	
American Indian	**1%**
Asian	**1%**
Black	**6%**
Hispanic	**46%**
White	**46%**
Non-English Home Language	**16%**
English Language Learners	**14%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**63%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

In sixth grade, 39% of the students met the reading goal, as compared to 66.4% statewide. In writing, 36% met the writing goal, while 59.7% of the students met the statewide goal. The fall 1999 scores in reading and writing for eighth grade students also indicated that over one-third (37%) of the students in reading and one-quarter (26%) of the students in writing did not meet the standard set by educators. Students who meet the statewide goal are capable of performing excellent work at their respective grade levels. The percentage of students participating in the statewide tests in lower than the statewide level, 82.4% versus 92.2%, respectively.

Introduction to Roosevelt Public School

A strip mall lines the highway within a mile of Roosevelt Public School. Shoppers are afforded a variety of goods within a limited price range in such stores as Ocean State Job Lot, BJ's, a Laundromat, Kentucky Fried Chicken, a dollar store, a car wash, a gas station, and a Chinese restaurant.

Red brick colonial style apartments about 20 years old give testimony to the approximate age of the neighborhood itself. The single-family track homes display a variety of colors and peeling paint. The homes have similar nondescript shrubs and sparse landscaping; few homes have any flowers. A lack of differentiation pervades the neighborhood.

Closer to the school the road slants uphill and trees line the road, offering shade. Here the feeling is more suburban, with trees creating consistency in atmosphere. Once the road flattens out at the top of the hill, Roosevelt Public School comes as a surprise, a modern red brick building standing in contrast to its surroundings. Once past the school,

the road ends in a T; the houses straight ahead—through the trees and down the hill—are lovely, well manicured homes that are impossible to reach directly, despite their proximity.

A sign-in sheet, occasionally staffed by volunteers, greets visitors immediately inside the front door. A clean, orderly feeling pervades the school building. The hallways are wide, the stairwells afford even middle schoolers enough space to move safely. A maze-like quality makes locating particular rooms difficult; as students at a given grade may be located in widely differing places in the school.

School Library and the Library/Media Specialist

The library maintains a variety of books for its students, including a solid selection of books in Spanish. The librarian, a friendly woman, seeks to help students make book choices that they will find appealing.

During one visit to the library, a class of high ability language arts students was working on a treasure hunt worksheet based on *The Yearling*. Students accessed a number of print and technological reference sources, including the almanac and the encyclopedia. Others experimented with looking for books about Florida in the stacks. Students are allowed to check out books from the library, either when teachers bring the class there or when the student has individual free time.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

Roosevelt Public School scores very low in the state, and an emphasis has been placed on reading. Because of the demonstrated need to improve performance (this is one of the 10 lowest scoring school in the state), the school has adopted a 90-minute block schedule for language arts classes, which meet daily. Other classes meet for 45-minute periods. Bells do not ring for passing periods, although they do ring at the end of the day. Two levels of classes are available, one for heterogeneously grouped students and the other, called Challenge classes, for higher ability students.

Classroom observation of one heterogeneous language arts class found that most classroom teachers use of small groups for assignments. Students are seated at desks arranged in clusters of four. These groups are regularly and systematically rewarded for participation and behavior, which translated into a room of happy, productive students who participated often and remained focused. The teacher is inordinately organized and positive with her students, many of whom have low skill level in language arts. She demands that students remained focused, that they maintain self-control, that they participate actively in their learning, and that they work well with other students in their group. Rewards are given often for maintaining these standards, and these rewards are earned weekly as a team rather than as individuals. At the end of each week, students can choose from a variety of rewards how they want to spend their earned points.

During the 90-minute block, students were introduced to the grading rubric for essay portion of the statewide test. The teacher showed students a copy of the rubric on overhead and clearly explained each score.

Most of the remainder of the class focused on the teacher's reading of sample essays that were shown on the overhead. Students were asked to grade each one, and then to show by raised hands how many had awarded each score. The teacher was able to gauge how well the students had internalized the grading system. By the end of the class, most students were typically within a point either way of the actual statewide test score.

Trade books were in evidence on a book spinner; titles varied. Six computers were set up, although the teacher had modified the lesson because none of them were able to print that day.

History of Challenge Classes

In language arts, Challenge Classes are offered in grades 6, 7, and 8. Prior to the current system, the Challenge Program originally provided pull-out classes for high-ability students; it was replaced with the current model because teachers taught traditional classes and then needed to provide enrichment in these courses.

Additional problems ensued as a result of the requirement of high ability students to take both a traditional class and an enrichment class; both courses required students to do homework. This additional class also precluded these students from selecting elective classes, since it took up the only open period in their schedules.

For these reasons, parents and board members discontinued the two-period instruction in language arts in favor of the current 90-minute language arts block. This block is to differentiate instruction for high-ability students; the board requires these classes to assign requisite numbers of novels, papers, and projects. Currently, 2 teachers teach the new courses: one has sixth and seventh grades, while the other teaches seventh and eighth grades.

Selection for Challenge Classes

The Challenge program is designed to be a high-level reading language arts class. Teachers build in enrichment as they can, usually in the form of products, but the emphasis is on high-level performance.

Selection for the program uses scores on the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) as the first cutoff. Additional students are added on the basis of teacher recommendation. Teachers are asked to look for students who have shown that they are capable and motivated to do the work, regardless of their DRP score. Challenge teachers believe a

problem with this selection method has been the high variance of ability in the general classroom. This wide range of students means that a student performing at the top of such a group may still be low functioning in the Challenge class. In addition, some are identified because they are not doing well in the regular class; perhaps because of motivation issues and their teacher believes their achievement may improve when the work is harder. Typically, these students continue to struggle with motivation.

Observation of Challenge Class #1

Ms. B's eighth grade classroom was crowded with tables, fixed cabinets on three sides of the room, dry erase board space, and materials. A revolving bookcase in one corner holding approximately 100 mostly classic books included *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Hatchet*, W*ar of the Worlds*, *Kidnapped*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

Students sat at 3 long tables, each large enough to accommodate 8 students. With 18 students in the class, tables provided ample space for students to spread out. Students included 10 girls and 8 boys. Ethnic backgrounds included 1 African American, 4 Hispanic, and 13 White students.

During one observation of Ms. B's class, students were reading *The Yearling* and had completed the first 10 chapters. The beginning of the class was spent with the teacher reassigning seating to minimize disruptions. Students were then asked to share their plans for their project for this novel; choices and working partners are recorded on the board. Ms. B reminded students to choose partners with whom they would be able to work well. Students designed project options, and Ms. B guided them to consider the novel as they worked. One student decided to create a *papier-mâché* deer. "Do you want it about deer in general or the one in the story?" The boy decided to work with the deer in the story. Shortly thereafter, two additional groups decided to create *papier-mâché* deer. The second group would add facts about deer with their model. The third group, in defending its choice, said, "But we are including Jodie, too." Ms. B pointed out that *papier-mâché* is not easy and that they should definitely work on the project well in advance to see if the students are comfortable working with it.

One student had no ideas. Ms. B guided him: "Think about it; look back at your notes. If you haven't decided by tomorrow, come see me." Another student opted to illustrate quotations. Project options included dioramas, models, cookbooks including food of the book's era, a journal of illustrated quotes, and a map of the area. Ms. B suggested that they not complete a generic map of Florida, but asked them to include facts specific to the particular location of the setting. The projects all were loosely connected to elements of the book.

Ms. B then shared that the criteria for the project would be provided the following day and requested that the students make a plan that included materials needed and steps to complete. She suggested that if the students needed some specific art materials they could check with the art teacher for assistance, thereby creating good use of the human

resources in the building. While the projects clearly involved an element of student choice, they did not typically exhibit advanced understandings of texts.

As Ms. B collected the homework, the noise in the room increased, a result of students' opening of folders and binders to procure the assignments. "This will be a graded assignment; I don't have it from everybody."

The class then moved to the library, where they were given a Florida worksheet with 26 blanks. They were to use the library to find the answers to questions including the capital, the largest city, and the date of its entrance into the Union. They were allowed to work with a partner. The first team to finish the assignment with all items correct would receive 5 bonus points on the next vocabulary quiz. All students were required to find all the information and to redo the items that they had done incorrectly. When students arrived at the library, they scrambled to access the computer resources and the encyclopedias. Three others roamed through the stacks, and one used an almanac. Two of the roamers finally settled at a table with 3 books. Students appeared focused on the task. The opportunity for extra points was well received.

Students moved away from the computer to the stacks and appeared to have used the computers to locate resources rather than to use the Internet. One partner asked another about the use of an index: "We have talked about some of these things, but I can't remember them."

The competition focused on the first 3 students to attain 100% accuracy; once the winners were named, the student motivation to complete the assignment slowed.

Observation of Challenge Class #2

The second Challenge class typified the kind of scarcity often evident in the classrooms of teachers new to the profession. Five classroom sets of novels were stacked in the cupboards beneath the windows, but no individual reading options existed in the classroom. Students were seated at tables; they moved around depending on their circumstances and the assignment. A dry erase board and overhead projector were placed at the front of the room, as well as a pull-down screen. A television screen was mounted in the upper corner. Two computers were available on one cabinet. The room was well lit with tile floor, taupe walls, and windows along the side opposite the door. All lights were turned out, yet plenty of light from the windows illuminated the room, even with the blinds drawn.

Sixteen students (9 girls, 7 boys) were seated at 3 large tables with folding chairs. The tables form a large U-shape and students sit on both sides.

Students in this class had been given the choice of reading *The Yearling* or *Chasing Redbird*, and all had decided to pursue *Redbird*. Because the annual state testing interrupted that unit, students had intermittent class sessions covering the various chapters in the book.

Instruction was oriented toward language arts rather than reading. Students had opportunities to draw and write responses based on the novel and on in-class readings. Typically the in-class reading was completed aloud by the teacher, who provided students with handouts of the text to be covered. Once the reading was finished, students responded to various prompts about the text, some of which included locating quotations to support their perspectives.

During one lesson, students were instructed to continue work on their descriptive writing on their dream home. Based on a reading selection they had completed earlier, they had been asked to describe their dream home and, optionally, to draw a floor plan of it. The instructor led a discussion about the writer and his goal of building a dream house. Students were then asked to share their own writings. A girl began:

> It was a bright sunny day in the state of Vermont. As I pulled in the driveway . . . . As I stepped onto my new porch . . . . I could smell the new porch wood that was just done . . . smoke was rising before my eyes. As I opened the door to my house just a crack, I smelled . . . it was like I could almost feel it. As the smoke went rushing by me, it felt like a quick burn rushing by my face . . . . As I walked into the living room. . . .

The class commented on her effective use of smells in her description. Other students shared and the class commented on what they found interesting or effective. After one description, they class discussed the relative size of a 6,000-foot floor plan. The teacher reiterated that the purpose of the assignment was to think about what is important before making a big decision.

Later in the period, students played the chain letter game, which requires partners to make a chain of words beginning with the same letter. One person names a word that starts with a given letter. Someone else then names another word that also begins with the same letter and that relates to the previous word. For example, *Legs* could be followed by *Long* as basketball players have long legs. This could be followed by *Light* (as rays of light can travel long distances) and *Live* (since plants need light to live).

The class played this game using vocabulary words instead of the same initial letter. They were to see how many vocabulary words they could get in a link. Students worked either with a partner or by themselves. Ms. B checked students' progress, and after allowing them to finish, she clarified the definitions and usages of several terms with which multiple teams experienced difficulty. Ms. B went on to explain the homework. Students were assigned to read to page 117 and write a response describing Zinny's feeling about Jake with one quote.

The students moved to another game, the dice game. Using vocabulary words, they were to cast the die, and apply the vocabulary word to the novel in one of six possible ways: Use it in a sentence; perform charades; draw a picture; state the

definition; describe how it is used in the book (*Chasing Redbird*); or the student's choice. Two teams in room competed against each other.

Challenge class reading instruction was characterized by the following practices:

1. Self-selected grouping for completing assignments.
2. Immediate feedback on assignments completed in class.
3. Reading of a class novel outside class.
4. Little direct instruction regarding reading strategies.
5. Options for personalizing assignments.
6. Writing assignments linked to class assigned literature.
7. Incorporating games into the learning of vocabulary.

Summary

Reading instruction is characterized by choice of books and instruction that incorporates reading, writing, and drawing. Connecting the assignments with literature was regarded as an important strategy. Students listened to teacher read-alouds and students followed up various prompts with written responses. The teacher provided immediate feedback on these assignments completed in class. Student options for personalizing reading assignments were encouraged and, when needed, reading skills were reinforced and practiced through learning games.

CHAPTER 10: Rosa Parks Middle School

Fredric J. Schreiber
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**7-8**
Student Population	**836**
Student Ethnicity:	
Black	**83%**
Hispanic	**16%**
White	**1%**
Non-English Home Language	**17%**
English Language Learners	**5%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**46%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Rosa Parks Middle School's statewide assessment of Reading, Writing, and Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) scores have increased since 1993 while remaining well below state levels. The percentage of students who achieved the state mastery level in the Fall 1999, eighth grade statewide assessment scores in the areas of Reading, Writing, and DRP scores increased to 35%, 38%, and 35% from the previous year's scores of 25%, 21%, and 25%, respectively. These scores represent an increase from those in 1993 (R-14%, W-10%, and DRP-14%), but it must be noted that the cohorts are entirely different, and fluctuations, both positive and negative, did occur in the interim. Regardless of the trend toward improved test scores, the administration and staff are acutely aware that the overall performance of the majority of Rosa Parks Middle School students has consistently fallen below state mastery level standards. Consequently, measures were undertaken, in concert with district-wide efforts, to correct the situation.

During this period, from 1993 to 1999, total instructional time for Language Arts and Reading increased from 240 hours per year to 328 hours per year, representing an increase of approximately 30 minutes per day of regularly scheduled instruction. In addition, the newly implemented Direct Instruction (SRA/McGraw Hill) remedial reading program increased the total instructional time devoted to Language Arts and Reading. The faculty at the school also undertook steps to increase time-on-task and address issues of continuity by standardizing the writing program. In addition to these measures, the school enacted a policy of block scheduling; restructured staff and students into four clusters or "houses" of two teams, with a vice principal assigned to each house; and instituted a policy of looping to reinforce seventh and eighth grade instructional continuity. Through a combination of Federal Department of Education Grants, Community, Business, and Institutional contributions, Rosa Parks Middle School is able to offer students access to homework assistance via the "Power Hour" after-school academic study program; statewide assessment proficiency training; one-on-one tutoring with their teachers and local university students; academic enrichment in the form of field trips to nearby business and cultural sites; and assistance developing social skills.

Introduction to Rosa Parks Middle School

Rosa Parks Middle School is a dark and imposing, flat-roofed, fortress-like structure built in 1971 in the shape of a "C." The dull smooth walls grow vertically from

unkempt grounds; large, darkened windows lay flush with the exterior. The school is located in an impoverished neighborhood with a working class African-American and Caribbean Islander population. At a time when a large corporation had its primary manufacturing facility located here, this area was home to a thriving community with substantial financial and cultural reserves; now, only dilapidated buildings and a once-beautiful Victorian park evidence a more genteel and comfortable past.

Geographically, the school is located approximately one mile north of the center of the city and is about the same distance from both the local law school and the nearby university, with whom it has an established relationship in the form of a program called "Educational Main Street." This is a cooperative, community-wide initiative designed to enhance children's school performance and prevent dropouts.

The school may be reached from one of two directions; the north approach is a gently curved, tree-lined street, with large, once ornate homes offset from wide stone sidewalks. The street meanders beside the park on its way toward the school. The other approach is accessed via a stop-signed, traffic-lighted, three-lane street, with boarded shops, beauty parlors, four-story apartment houses, burned-out gas stations, pawn shops, jerk joints, social clubs, empty lots, and parking lots. McDonald's, directly across the way, is home to a quick meal and a Police substation. Rosa Parks Middle School is something of a metaphor in this community—it fills the void between the splendor that once characterized the neighborhood, and the poverty that resides there now. This community's children come here to learn and to grow and perhaps to find some meaning in the juxtaposition of these two worlds, and by most reports, Rosa Parks Middle School staff is committed to work long hours to help students accomplish this goal.

The entrance to the school is through a series of barred Plexiglas doors. There are surveillance cameras and a high profile Security Force and Police presence. All visitors must sign in and be received or acknowledged by the person they are to meet. Telephones and digital information communication systems are installed in each room. The halls are wide, and though recently painted, in need of repair; there are few adornments on the walls except on the first floor where current student work or inspirational posters are on display. One of the teachers relates that recently there was to be an inspection of the facility as the entire interior of the building was to have been painted, the work had not been completed so the day before the inspectors were to arrive, a crew of workers came in and finished painting the halls. The doors to the classrooms were never opened, as the painters completed only what they could reach; they have yet to return so most teachers are still waiting for their classrooms to be painted.

School Administration

BM is a quiet, attractive, and thoughtful woman who has spent over 25 years in the field of education as both classroom instructor and administrator. Her determination, ready smile, and calm demeanor serve her well in a challenging educational institution and environment. Her undergraduate studies were completed at a state college with graduate work in Supervision and Administration at a local university. The local

university is located only one mile from Rosa Parks Middle School and BM has maintained ties with the university as part of her efforts to offer her students every possible opportunity for an excellent education. In 1975, she assumed a position of social studies teacher at Rosa Parks Middle School, becoming vice principal in 1989. BM remained in this post until 1996 when she was moved to an urban elementary school as principal. She subsequently returned to Rosa Parks Middle School in 1998 in the same capacity.

As the principal of an urban school, many of the issues BM is called upon to deal with on a daily basis are not directly tied to the curriculum. Safety and discipline are of primary importance, and so a conflict arises between her wish to function as the school's instructional leader and her responsibilities as the building administrator as the day-to-day needs of the staff and students can be an all-consuming endeavor. Consequently, her reliance on the teaching staff to function autonomously is of paramount importance. With this in mind a tiered, four-cluster arrangement of mixed seventh and eighth graders was instituted along with block scheduling several years ago. Each house has two teams and works with a single vice principal, and all teams and vice principal's report to BM.

BM is acutely aware of the importance of proficiency in language arts and subscribes to the implementation of district-wide mandated intervention measures in the form of the SRA/McGraw Hill Direct Instruction Corrective Reading Program. In addition, she is aware that there are students who meet or exceed proficiency criteria for reading and so would benefit from an alternative program. To this end she and a team of "internal consultants" developed a grouping arrangement and a plan of study that consists of four selections in differing literary styles, from fiction to nonfiction, and poetry to plays that address the needs of on- and above-grade level readers.

BM also understands the need for students to be exposed to the world outside formal education. In interviews and discussions she relates her belief that if students understand the purpose served by a good education in support of providing opportunities that can better their circumstances, then the chance of their staying in school and completing their education will be enhanced. A continual stream of guest speakers representing various trades and professions and visits to regional business and cultural sites addresses these needs. In keeping with this philosophy, BM also encourages her staff's professional development by offering her support for both on- and off-site training and workshops.

Her continuing relationship with the local university in the form of "Educational Main Street" offers still other opportunities for her students. At the middle school level this cooperative initiative focuses on improving academic performance and preventing dropouts. Specifically, there is a Tutoring Program that provides one-on-one support, classroom assistance, and support for after school academic activities for students at Rosa Parks Middle School. There is also a Parent Education program consisting of workshops for parents addressing a variety of academic and social-emotional issues. A "Transitional Program" is designed to ease students' move from primary to middle school and from middle to high school. The inclusion of these initiatives into the school's already

crowded agenda underscores the importance placed on social and emotional issues by both the faculty and the administration. These actions also signify recognition of the impact these matters have on Rosa Parks Middle School students' academic achievement and success.

School Library and Library/Media Specialist

Rosa Parks Middle School library is centrally located to the classrooms on the second floor. One enters through 2 glass doors that form part of a glass wall opening onto a main hallway. The room is large and open with the stacks at the center of the space; a group of 8 computer workstations are nearby. These computers are Internet linked and are fully capable of all word processing operations. To the left of the library's entrance is the book checkout counter and behind it the Librarian/Media Specialist's office. In a room just past this is a computer laboratory. The back wall is mostly glass and provides a view of the local fire station. Surrounding the center stacks, containing approximately 11,000 volumes, are numerous tables. In the far back of the library is a formal study area, wherein teachers may conduct class if they choose. The librarian, like most members of the instructional staff, is required to teach a Direct Instruction class each day during first period and so uses this area for that purpose. The library's walls are adorned with both printed and student produced posters celebrating the accomplishments of Black Americans; other hangings offer encouragement and words of advice to students.

The Librarian, IS, is a good natured, affable man who seems to enjoy his professional duties and the opportunities to work with students. In interviews, he indicated that numerous students use the facility each day; many come individually or in small groups to do research for class projects, and teachers frequently bring their entire class. However, on multiple visits to the facility, this degree of usage was not observed. As one might expect, he is also very involved in the reading and language arts program, in general, and acts as a member of the internal enrichment reading program consulting group. When asked about the school district's commitment to continue development of the library, IS is less optimistic; funding for any additional purchase of books has been curtailed after 3 years of steady funding. During this time there were funds available to purchase nearly 1,000 books per year. He is hopeful that funding will be restored in this year's budget.

Classroom Reading Instruction and the Regular Reading Program

As in other middle schools in the district, the seventh and eighth grade Reading Program at Rosa Parks includes two distinct parts: the SRA/McGraw Hill Direct Instruction Corrective Reading Program (DI) for below grade level readers; and a reading program for at- and above-level readers that makes use of specific works of literature as well as the McDougal-Littel "The Language of Literature" series. What is distinctive about the regular Language Arts program at Rosa Parks Middle School is that it is viewed

as an enrichment program, and it was developed internally with the full cooperation, encouragement, and support of the principal. In addition to these two core programs, there is a third program that addresses the special needs and abilities of more highly capable readers. This group consists of 35 students who have been identified as gifted readers owing to a demonstrated high level of skill and personal commitment to the study of language arts. These students are offered the option of attending a special preparatory Algebra class instead of a formal reading class and so receive no formal reading instruction during the year other than that which is included as a part of their English class. These students' Language Arts requirements are fulfilled as a differentiated program of independent study under the supervision of a designated instructor.

Students who are reading at on- or above-grade level are scheduled into what are termed "enrichment" reading classes. This program, developed by 2 internal Reading Consultants, is new and began in December. These same 2 teachers are also responsible for the operation of the DI program. The intent of the enrichment program is to expose capable students to literary forms they will encounter in high school. Specifically, they provide students with the opportunity to study at least four works of literature, each for approximately one month, each representing a different literary style (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and theater). Classroom activities entail reading aloud; note taking; developing word and meaning lists; and discussing summary characterization and development, plot, setting, and theme. Team members who are assigned to these classes may or may not be Language Arts teaching specialists and this is a cause of concern for some; they are recruited into an instructional position for which they may have little or no actual expertise and although a teacher's guide for each topic is provided, no specific training is offered. The school's trained, certified reading instructors are all assigned to the Direct Instruction classes, as it is believed their expertise will be beneficial to the success of the program. Despite the difficulties involved, the general attitude of those concerned is positive. It is understood that this is a new program and that it holds great promise for students; certain problems are bound to present themselves and these will be addressed by a concerned and committed administration.

Students who have completed the Success for All program in sixth grade, and who are identified as reading below grade level, are placed in a DI reading program where they are grouped according to skill level. DI is highly scripted, remedial in nature, and focuses on developing phonetically based decoding skills; classes are 45 minutes in length and are taught during the first period of each day. Language Arts instructors who have received specific training in the course material and method of delivery teach the course. All program material and instructor training is produced and provided for by SRA/McGraw Hill. Identification for inclusion in the DI program is determined by a student's performance on screening tests supplied by the program's producers. In addition to these criteria, other sources of information concerning students' reading skills, such as statewide assessment reading scores, SFA performance, and teacher evaluations are also given consideration. Of the 836 students who are enrolled at Rosa Parks Middle School this year, approximately 110 students met the criteria for on- or above-level reading skills and were exempt from taking DI classes. The DI program is mandated by the district and

was instituted as a complementary follow-on to the highly concentrated PK-6 SFA reading program.

Seventh Grade Reading and Language Arts Classroom

Students are restless as they wait in their homeroom for the day's schedule to begin—school has been closed due to a severe snowstorm and they are all full of stories and winter tales. Attendance is taken and some items regarding an upcoming class trip are reviewed; the students going to the Enrichment Reading class are dismissed and they file out. The students in the Direct Instruction reading class will remain here, as they do everyday at this time, with JJ, one of the DI instructors. There are no bells or signals of any sort to indicate a change of period as the school is on block scheduling and no two of the clusters (there are four with two teams each) are scheduled the same.

The on- and above-grade level group walk down the hall and turn into a room that is immediately recognizable as an Art room; MP, the instructor, is one of the Art teachers. The group of 8 students—3 females and 5 males—seat themselves at tables; notebooks are readied and books are retrieved from a pile on a counter behind MP's desk. There is an area to the rear of the room with large tables suitable for drawing and sculpting, the rest of the room is set with classroom desks and chairs; there are 2 computers to one side and no in-class reading library. Each student has an assigned textbook for which he/she is responsible; these books are piled on a cabinet near the entrance to the room. MP explains this is the program's first year of operation, and they will be working with 4 books representing four literary styles; these are selected by a group of Rosa Parks Middle School Language Arts teachers who are referred to as "Internal Reading Consultants." The book, *The House of Dies Drear*, by Virginia Hamilton, is the second book of the year and is the fiction component of the program. It is a story about an African-American family who moves to a new town and encounters a mystery associated with an old house that use to be part of the underground railroad during the Civil War a place where 2 slaves were murdered and the secret of their demise is kept by a mysterious stranger. It is a dramatic story of a family caught in an atmosphere of fear and danger. The previous book, *I, Juan d'Parteja*, was an autobiography, and was followed by William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *As You Like It*, the year's theatrical work; the year will conclude with a collection of poetry, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, and a selection of short stories and independent study projects.

As MP gets things settled, some of the students are drawing pictures. It seems one of the activities they engage in is pictorially representing the action that takes place within the chapter they are reading. MP informs the class that Chapter 8 notes are due today. She explains that they have much work to make up, owing to absences and school closings, so they will be reading and taking notes both today and tomorrow and these will be handed in at the close of each class. She then points out that their real concern at the moment is the need to complete this book as soon as possible; their next book(s), two plays by William Shakespeare, will be arriving any day and they must be ready to start them immediately so as to not fall behind the rest of the groups. Most of the students are

working on their drawings or writing notes from the book, but they are all attentive to MP's comments as well.

At 8:40, the class is instructed to stop their other work and open to page 190. There is a quick review of the previous chapter and the storyline to date. MP engages the class using a question and answer format with some running commentary, while at the same time eliciting detailed descriptions of the characters, location, action, and possible motivations underlying these actions; though a little slow to respond, the students are engaged. MP selects one young man and asks him to begin reading aloud; he begins, reading slowly, word by word, using his finger to maintain his place—MP occasionally stops him to correct pronunciation, missed words, punctuation, or incorrect inflection. While he reads, the rest of the class follows along intently and also use their fingers to maintain position on the page. After about 8 minutes and 3 pages, MP asks this young man to stop and asks another to begin where he left off. This boy reads with great fluency and expression, and stops using his finger as he continues with the story. After 5 pages, and 6 minutes MP, who has remained at her desk at the front of the class, stops him; the class then enters a discussion of what has occurred so far. As they do so, some are taking notes and/or drawing small pictures in their notebooks. There is one student who has not participated much in the discussion and who has not written much down and MP admonishes him for this. She mentions a strategy they are encouraged to use to help them formulate their thoughts—"What came before; what happens at the beginning of this action; what is occurring during the action; and what happens afterward."

MP opens the discussion again and one of the boys asks a question regarding the action and MP goes into a detailed description of the characters, their possible motivations for why they did what they did and how the students might approach this type of problem in the future. The boy is still unclear and tries to ask the question again in a different fashion but is having difficulty verbalizing his thoughts. MP does not pursue the subject any further, instead asking if "there are any words for the dictionary?" As part of their studies, any words not understood by a student are copied to a "dictionary" and looked up for later reference; this is done at the end of each chapter as well as the taking of notes on the substantive material. Some of the students do not have their notebooks and no paper is provided for them so they mostly sit quietly and read.

The time is now a little after 9:00 and the discussion turns to a class trip that will occur tomorrow. MP mentions the students who will be going will be chosen today and the criteria for selection are grades and behavior. "I just found out that some students in enrichment got F's! I didn't know you could get an F in enrichment; those of you I gave C's to may have gotten lower." Students who receive failing grades are excluded from any field trips. Moreover, one or both parents are called in for a conference to discuss the situation. As both parents usually work, this conference is an inconvenience requiring them to take time off to come into school but as this cluster makes a concerted effort to involve parents in the process, the conference occurs, regardless of the difficulty it causes. There is no comment by any of the students; with this they begin reading aloud again. MP calls on the young man she had previously castigated for not having taken any notes to read the next passage; he begins and reads well. They are now on Chapter 15,

the second chapter of the day and have covered approximately 10 pages aloud in class. A number of students are beginning to show signs of inattention just before class is called to a halt at the bottom of page 203. Without instructions for further reading or assignments due, review of what was covered, or any word of dismissal, the students stand, put their books away and leave the room and head back to their respective homerooms.

Speaking with MP afterwards she discusses her unhappiness with the new reading program explaining: "There was no training, no direction . . . just do it." She also relates her discomfort with having to teach Shakespeare—she would never have chosen this, "I could use a class in Shakespeare!" She further explains that the book they are now reading is far more relevant and easy to teach as it deals with issues of ethnicity and prejudice in an historical setting. She explains that it is a fictionalized history but it is based on fact and it relates to the manner in which people were forced to live to circumstances one might find oneself in today and this she believes is important.

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

The reading "enrichment" program at Rosa Parks Middle School includes two parts. The first is a new program begun this year; it includes the 110 on- and above-grade level readers in a school of 836, and it makes use of four distinctive literary works and styles selected by 2 Internal Reading Consultants. These are members of the Language Arts Department and they work in concert with the rest of the staff and with the principal, BM, in selecting the texts to be used for instruction. Instruction focuses on reading and study skills, as well as on the role of literature as a cultural agent. In this it addresses socially relevant issues as might be found in works of contemporary and historical literature. Also considered are focused studies in characterization, plot development, theme, and setting.

As noted earlier, four works were selected for study this year, each for one month beginning in December: Non-fiction—*I, Juan d'Parteja*; Fiction—*The House of Dies Dread*; Theatre—*A Midsummer's Night Dream*, and *As You Like It*; Poetry—*Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. In addition, there is a poetry "contest," so students may compose verse in the style of their own selection; works are then chosen to be published as part of a compendium of student work. A short section on Short Stories "rounds out" their study of literary styles. The year's final activity is an independent study project wherein each student produces a literary work based on a style he/she has studied and finds interesting.

The second component of the reading enrichment program purports to address the needs and abilities of highly advanced readers. Thirty-five students from both the seventh and eighth grades, identified by standardized test scores and teacher recommendation as having high levels of reading and comprehension skills as well as a strong personal commitment to independent study, are opted out of any formal reading class. Instead, they are provided with the opportunity to develop an individual reading program under the supervision and guidance of an instructor. These students have no formal reading class, but they do attend a Language Arts class later in the day, as do all

students, when they study the formal aspects of writing, language, and grammar in connection with literature. In addition to these studies there are also three weekly statewide assessment preparatory classes for all students. The books used in these classes are separate from those used in the reading program. In the place of regular classroom reading instruction, these students attend an Algebra preparatory class.

Summary

Rosa Parks Middle School is an evolving study of education in a complex and dynamic educational environment. The moments at work, that either support students' success or tend to work against them, are deeply rooted in the local culture, which is in turn reflective of conditions on a more global scale. It is clear that the administration and teaching staff is wholly committed to providing students with opportunities that will provide the skills and knowledge necessary to become self-sufficient, self-motivated lifelong learners. On the other hand, restricted budgets, overcrowding, and student disengagement owing to myriad social pressures and constraints, as well the weight of standardized testing and their ramifications, work to nullify the best intentions. Nowhere in the curriculum is this more evident than in the language arts program. The litmus test of proficiency is placed squarely on this one aspect of a student's education, and well it should be, for if the ability to read and comprehend that which is read is not in place, then a student's formal education will be at an end; this is recognized and acknowledged. Consequently, every effort is made to develop this proficiency in the most effective and efficient manner possible. This translates into enormous amounts of class time spent in this regard—usually at the expense of other studies. And for those few students who do possess a high ability in this area, the lack of additional competent and trained staff who might provide them with alternative, challenging studies in the language arts, often results in abandonment, at least at the middle school level, of the subject. Stated more bluntly, while a reading enrichment program does exist on paper, the reality is that the overwhelming pressure to raise the level of reading for the vast majority of underperforming students must and does take precedence. It is however, the distal objective of teachers and administration to reverse this condition, and the fact that an enrichment program has begun to take on form and substance speaks volumes for addressing the needs of talented readers in the future.

CHAPTER 11: Southside Elementary School

Rebecca D. Eckert
Fredric J. Schreiber
Sally M. Reis

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**K-5**
Student Population	**471**
Student Ethnicity:	
Asian	**3%**
Black	**4%**
Hispanic	**8%**
White	**85%**
Non-English Home Language	**8%**
English Language Learners	**5%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**10%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Reading scores from the statewide assessment have remained stable for 3 of the 4 previous years with an unusually low score occurring in 1998. In the fall of 1999, the statewide assessment reading test results indicated that 76% of the school's fourth grade students were meeting the state goal, while the Writing Sample results showed that 74% of the students were at or above goal in this area.

The percentage of fourth grade students (76%) at Southside Elementary School that met the statewide reading goal is the same number for the district. A slightly higher percentage of students (74%) at Southside Elementary School met the writing goal, as compared to the district percentage of 70%. The percentage of students who can perform tasks with minimal teacher assistance is much higher than the state levels, which are approximately 55% in reading and math.

Introduction to Southside Elementary School

A sense of warmth seems to pervade Southside Elementary School. A tree-lined avenue stretching in front of the school is packed with mini-vans and SUVs dropping students off for school. The stateliness of the well-kept brick building, constructed in 1952, is enhanced by the ivy that covers its front. Above the front door is a white banner with bold green words that state, "Our Public Schools Ranked #1 in the State!" Flanking the entranceway are 2 teachers who exchange jokes and words of encouragement with the small children entering the building carrying bookbags and bright umbrellas. Stretching behind the school are many outdoor recreational opportunities for students: a large macadam playground decorated with a brightly colored map of the United States, as well as four-square and hopscotch grids, 5 half-size basketball courts, a small 100 yard track, 2 swing sets, 3 modern colorful jungle gym sets sporting a variety of slides and secret spots, 2 green soccer fields, and 2 baseball diamonds. The area is surrounded by a fence

for safety that is hidden in many spots by shrubs and pine trees, lending a natural air to the school's boundaries.

The school is nestled in the heart of a suburban neighborhood and is surrounded by carefully tended grass, shrubs, and tall whispering pines. Lining the clean, winding streets that encircle the school are neat, orderly, colonial houses whose faded colors, aged maple trees, and evidence of home improvements and expansions give a feeling of long standing permanence to the spacious dwellings. Throughout the neighborhood, signs advertise the services of painters, contractors, chimney sweeps, and landscapers. A canopy of leafy green trees in the gentle sloping neighborhoods seems to hide the close proximity of this school to a major northeastern urban center fraught with poverty and need that is less than 10 miles away.

Entering the school, visitors and students are greeted by a friendly, large green *papier-mâché* dragon that serves as the mascot. Lobby walls are papered with neatly-labeled artwork of fourth grade students who have painted illustrations to various lines of the song "America the Beautiful." Children travel purposefully through the hallways, on their own or in pairs, without the aid of direct adult supervision, while a number of parents and volunteers in the hallway offer assistance or directions to an unfamiliar adult. The office staff of 3 administrative assistants bustles with activity, responding to the queries of both parents and students, while maintaining an open, friendly attitude.

The Southside Elementary PTO provides each family with an attractive 51-page handbook with the usual mission statement, staff directories, and school rules, and the name, parents' names, address, and phone number of each student in the school community. Detailed descriptions of all PTO functions and volunteer opportunities are also explained. Envisioning the school as a community that emphasizes the "unlimited potential" in every child is a key point of the mission statement found in the handbook. To accomplish this goal and prepare students for the 21st century, the faculty strives to "ensure high individual achievement, develop critical thinking skills, foster creativity, and celebrate personal uniqueness." The guidebook also describes the gifted program that is designed to provide enrichment and talent development for all students.

The school wide enrichment program is a collaborative effort with the talent development program of a local major university. According to the description, although every student benefits from participating in various activities sponsored by the gifted program, weekly activities are designed for students who have "demonstrated a need for additional academic challenges based on their classroom performance, achievement, and aptitude."

School Administration

KT is a person of strength and focus whose energies and adventurous spirit are concentrated on the growth and development of her students and teachers. Likewise, Southside Elementary School possesses a vibrant academic atmosphere, well suited to the dynamic personality of its principal. From her comments, it is clear at the onset that there

is nothing more important to KT than the creation of a safe, vital, and sustainable learning environment.

KT has been in the field of education for 26 years, beginning her undergraduate training at a prestigious east coast university, and receiving her B.A. in Educational Psychology. Upon completion, she taught English for 4 years at a Title 10 school. Feeling the need for a new challenge, she opted to enter the private sector and worked for a time with an organization that developed and marketed speed-reading programs for educational institutions. While this was stimulating, she remarked that it was too far removed from classroom instruction to be satisfying, although it did provide insight into the workings of the business side of education. The result was a return to the west coast to study for her M.A.Ed. in the area of Curriculum and Instruction; at which time she also received her Administrative Certification.

The next 10 years were spent teaching elementary school in the areas of English and Mathematics. Eventually KT assumed a position as vice principal of a middle school, where her focus was on making substantial improvements to the existing math program. A middle school principal's position followed where, over a period of 4 years, she successfully introduced a technology program that was integrated into all areas of study. Her current position as principal at the Southside Elementary School brings her full circle, back to the primary grades where she suggests, "a person can make a real difference—it's where the action is."

Drawing on these rich and varied experiences, KT advocates a strong and dynamic educational program with a robust emphasis on reading. To this end, she relies on a full time reading curriculum specialist who, in concert with the school's teachers, librarian/media specialist, and parents, has developed and enacted a multitiered reading program responsive to the varied needs and capacities of all students. She explains that while the district has prescribed certain goals and objectives in the area of reading and reading comprehension, she and her staff perceive this as being a minimum requirement and strive to far surpass its objectives.

Specifically the school has adopted, and is piloting a new anthology-based reading program in the lower grades. KT describes it as, "an eclectic mix of material including traditional text books, phonics, whole language, and a strong reliance on technology." This program is being implemented in concert with a strong emphasis on professional development. KT admits to the existence of some reticence on the part of a small number of teachers regarding the adoption of the new model, due to the fact that there has been no call on the part of central administration to do so. However, she feels that if attention is given to assisting these staff members during the transitional period, they will find the new program offers far more to their students than that which is already in place. She speaks freely of the need for differentiation and enrichment as well as the need to keep staff open to and aware of new curricular models.

Regarding differentiation and enrichment, KT speaks of the critical need to address both the areas of strength and weakness of all students. In this regard, she and

her staff have introduced programs at a number of levels to address such needs. In the lower grades, first through third, the focus is on learning to read with an emphasis on, "tracking each student's skills development and responding to strengths and weaknesses on an individual basis," employing both group and personalized assessment and instruction. However, as students progress through the third grade, the focus of reading instruction gradually shifts from the mechanics of reading to an emphasis on the skills needed for reading to learn. In addition, she has encouraged a reading intervention program of 8 weeks duration for those students who exhibit particularly acute weaknesses. She describes this "early intervention" stemming from her favorable experiences with the "Reading Recovery" program.

For readers at and above grade level, she encourages an emphasis on integrating reading into and across all curricular areas, again with a strong emphasis on the use of technology. However, she does not view technology as a replacement for more traditional methods, but instead as an adjunct capacity in recognition of its own particular strengths, especially in the area of expanding the scope and range of information sources available to students. Once again, she emphasizes the critical need for professional development opportunities and encourages her staff, by way of providing time and resources, to engage in activities that are both meaningful and relevant to their area of instruction and personal needs.

Ultimately, it is the depth and breadth of experiences in the field of education, coupled with her clear and decisive personality that provides the Southside Elementary School with an administrator who not only has a vision of excellence in education, but the where-with-all to convey this vision to her staff and work towards its realization.

Curriculum Specialist

Curriculum specialist, TR, is an energetic woman with a wide array of experience on which to rely as she coaches Southside's teachers. Although hired 2 years ago as a curriculum specialist for the Southside Elementary School because of her skills and knowledge in science, she is responsible for coordinating the curriculum in all content areas. TR perceives her role at Southside as providing support for the teachers in delivering the curriculum to the students. She characterizes this task as helping teachers to achieve the best fit between the curriculum and the student through the use of differentiation, which has been identified as a goal of the district. To achieve this, she may work with a large group of educators or with one teacher, depending on the situation and teacher's needs. According to TR, the overall aim of the Southside reading program is "to make a child a reader." She explained that fostering a love of reading is placed above process and comprehension in the district's delineation of their reading program. Nevertheless, the curriculum states that the teacher is held responsible for ensuring that a student demonstrates at least a year of growth in reading over the course of the year.

According to TR, the district adopted the use of the Houghton Mifflin Reading Anthology a decade ago as one component of the reading program. At the time of

adoption, the series provided the reading skills that were needed as well as a solid base for questioning and comprehension. During the interview, however, TR indicated that the district is beginning a new textbook adoption of the Harcourt Brace reading series because it enables more individualization of instruction and encourages higher level reasoning skills with its questioning skills. The series is being gradually phased in at the younger grade levels. TR pointed out that although the district supports the use of an anthology, especially for new teachers who may need more guidance and support in choosing an appropriate skill level, the goal of the district's professional development is to move teachers "beyond the anthology" toward a more personal, creative style of teaching.

To establish this goal, the school district has initiated several proactive strategies to support differentiation in the reading classroom. The first is a professional development schedule that utilizes early dismissals for all students on Wednesdays so that teachers can spend the afternoon working on their own skills and goals. Often, teachers remain in their own school building attending sessions or working privately with a colleague; however, twice each year, a 3-week series of courses is offered district wide. The topics of these courses focus on various skills and techniques and are mainly taught by expert teachers and administrators from the district. Another valuable tool for teachers is the Reading Guidebook developed 3 years ago by a group of 25 district educators. Using the research and guidance provided by the Reading Guidebook, this thick notebook delineates expectations in reading for both teachers and students, as well as providing assessment tools and sample lessons. TR is confident in the quality of the faculty that she serves, and expressed her belief that the Reading Guidebook was an invaluable tool, but teachers still must utilize "their own art" and experience to develop effective reading instruction.

Despite a district emphasis on differentiation, when asked about specific services provided for talented readers, TR offered limited options. She explained that some individual teachers provide differentiation for talented readers and the pull out enrichment program beginning in third grade also offered options. However, as was evident during conversations with the principal, the overall focus of differentiation strategies at Southside Elementary School is geared toward average and low-ability students.

School Library and the Library/Media Specialist

The open, sunlit hallway near the library echoes with the tones of students struggling with clarinets mingled with the thumping of a physical education class in full swing. JD, the librarian/media specialist, was interviewed in the school's computer lab. She explained that she is new to the school, but was glad to share her experiences and impressions thus far. Despite the fact that she describes herself as "glossy new" to the school, JD considers herself fortunate to have had 6 years of elementary classroom background experience. Both her undergraduate and graduate work were completed at the same college. However, her library endorsement was achieved through a new

program offered by the state that attempted to address the need for qualified teachers in shortage areas by providing alternate pathways. In addition to her prerequisite teaching experience and Master's degree, JD participated in a year of seminars, several internships, and 5 weeks of hands-on training in a variety of educational technologies including Web Quests.

The perimeter of the computer lab is lined with 14 computers, while a mobile constructed of decorated CDs hangs overhead, reflecting the sun's light in a variety of colors and patterns on the white walls and high ceiling. Seated in one of the child-sized copies of an executive's chair complete with plastic wheels, the librarian explained that her "job is to be an instructional partner with the teachers." Although she would characterize most of the teachers as tech-savvy, she explained that they have the option of enlisting her help or signing up "to do their own thing" in the computer lab. In addition to the relatively new IBM computers flanked on both sides with speakers and headphones, the computer lab is also equipped with a LCD display for demonstrations and 2 digital cameras as well as a CD burner on order. Teachers are also able to borrow the new school laptop computer for use in conjunction with the LCD display in their own classroom.

Technology support for the entire district, is easily accessed by all faculty and staff via email or telephone to attend to computer problems. This feature enables the entire town to be fully networked and provides each adult in the building with access to Lotus notes.

Adjacent to the computer lab is the main portion of the library where mauve, plastic chairs surround a hexagonal table. Above a bank of shelves, decorating the clean, white walls, hangs a large painting that is reminiscent of Monet's *Water Lilies* complete with three-dimensional water lilies constructed of tissue paper floating in the water.

JD explained that she is working on a proposal for a new flexible schedule for the library. If her proposal is accepted, the children in kindergarten through second grade will receive an orientation to the library for one half-hour session per week throughout the month of September. Starting in October, the children will then use the same library block for story time and book selection. The older students in third through fifth grades currently spend 1 hour each week in the library. While half of the class searches for books and discusses library and reading skills, the other half of the class works in the computer lab. JD acknowledges that with a lab capacity of 14 computers, it becomes crowded when an entire class of older students is scheduled at one time. To enable students to continue research or an ongoing project, the librarian is suggesting that the older students actually schedule their library time on a biweekly basis in clusters tied to their curriculum so that individual classes have the opportunity to work in the library for more than one day per week.

Library instruction at the third grade level focuses on special pages. These include the title page with an explanation of the copyright and its ramifications, as well as the value, use, and format of the table of contents, glossary, and index. Over the course

of the year, each student selects a topic and creates relevant sample pages utilizing a keyboarding program. To accomplish this, students employ alphabetical order, main topics with sub-topics, page order of the table of contents, the use of commas and hyphens in the index, and glossary. When asked about modifications made for talented readers, no specific suggestions or strategies were offered.

Flanked by white, wooden shelves filled with brightly colored hardback books, JD assured us that the children are welcome in the library at any time, when issued a pass by their teacher. When a child arrives, JD or one of the many adults from an army of volunteers conducts a brief interview. Their goal is to focus on the task and help locate the type of resources that the student needs. JD is also available to assist teachers in assembling a content collection of 30 to 40 books to be sent to an individual classroom to support a unit of study.

The library employs the *Athena* circulation system that assigns a bar code to each book, which is then tracked by computer. Kindergarten students are permitted to check out one book on a weekly basis, while older students are permitted to have up to 2 pleasure reading books at any given time in a 2 week circulation. However, children who are pursuing a research topic are able to check out more books with the librarian's approval.

JD described the retrospective conversion that occurred in the library last year before her arrival. The library collection was "heavily weeded," with all paperback books being distributed to the teachers' classroom libraries, reducing the library collection to just over 7,000 volumes. Hard-backed books were purchased to return library volume to 10,300 volumes. Much of this year's purchasing for the library collection focused on emergent literacy. This year's goal is to increase the library's holdings to 11,000 volumes, bringing it in line with the national standards; however, JD stated that no examination of the need for advanced-level reading materials has occurred.

JD pointed out her reading area. Along the far wall was a brick fireplace, which remained unnoticed until the shelves of the library had been removed for carpet installation. JD confessed that she is concerned about the temptation for the children to crawl into the small inviting space and so in the hearth sits a large vanilla candle flanked by black metal andirons that the librarian introduces as her "Augusta Baker storytelling candle." According to JD, Augusta Baker, a well-known librarian and storyteller, established a tradition that the lighting of a candle was to transport the reader to the world of the book and extinguishing the candle would bring them safely back to earth.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The classroom teacher, PS, is a veteran teacher with 35 years of experience and advanced degrees in early childhood education and special education. In an interview conducted after the classroom observations, PS explained that he continues to acquire new teaching skills all the time and is willing to try these techniques with his students.

He acknowledged that this attitude, coupled with his years of experience and a willingness for self-reflection, allows him to explore and implement the reading strategies that really work best for his students.

Students in this classroom are given the opportunity to work in a variety of configurations throughout the day. The reading program is characterized by both individual and group instruction, allowing students to be flexibly grouped. The teacher also assigns 25 minutes of independent reading as homework each evening in addition to weekly spelling assignments. Student progress in independent reading is assessed 2-3 times each week by a short interview with the teacher whose questions are geared toward determining student comprehension of the current reading selection. This information is then recorded in the student's individual reading record. The school district has set a target goal for each third grade student to read 30 books successfully over the course of the school year. To document attainment, each student has his or her own small black notebook in which the reading record is kept safely in the classroom. When PS believes that important progress has been made, the student receives a smelly sticker on the cover. The third grade classroom is an inviting place designed to spark student curiosity. All available wall space is covered with colorful displays featuring various Native American tribes, a food guide pyramid, and step-by-step guides for writing and reading, each linked to the curriculum. Also "growing" between 2 windows is a food chain display featuring a number of interesting animals surrounding a tree trunk with limbs constructed of string and large brightly colored leaves that branch out across the ceiling of the room, forming a cheerful fall canopy. In the back corner near the sink is a cage containing a dozen newly hatched ducklings who occasionally peep excitedly over the murmur of students at work. During classroom transitions, students are eager to observe and handle the fuzzy birds. In the other back corner sit 2 computers; however, they remained turned off during all the observations. At the front of the room flanking the chalkboard hangs a telephone for easy communication with the rest of the building and a large whiteboard on which the teacher writes the day's assignments. On the other side of the chalkboard near the door, a water fountain is freely available for student use at all times.

Just inside the door is an open, carpeted area reserved for quiet times and whole group instruction. Student desks and tables are arranged in small groups around the perimeters of this area, forming winding pathways and providing a feeling of space and independence to the classroom. Old recycled tennis balls are ingeniously fitted to the end of the chair legs to muffle the sounds of student movement, providing a kid-friendly atmosphere and even greater flexibility in grouping. Although there is no permanent classroom library, thematic collections of books, including a selection of 40 fairy tales representing several cultures, from the school library are attractively arranged on the heating unit and windowsills that stretch the length of the classroom. PS has established a system of rotating classroom librarians to oversee the use of these books by class members. When the classroom collection changes, so does the job assignment.

With the sun streaming through the bank of windows into the third grade class, PS is seated in his blue director's chair waiting for the students to settle down and begin their reading lesson. Beside him, 5 student chairs are arranged in an arc, consisting of 2 girls

and 3 boys who are identified as strong readers because of the previous year's standardized test scores. Currently, these 5 students are serving as group leaders for the recently introduced reciprocal reading strategy. Working with a select panel of students, PS models an activity or strategy for the whole class and then each group is given the opportunity to practice independently. Seated on the carpet in front of this "panel" are the remaining 16 students. Each student is holding a copy of the Houghton Mifflin anthology *Just Listen* with a "Reciprocal Teaching Cards" worksheet tucked inside the still-glossy cover. According to PS, the anthology is used when introducing a new topic, technique, or skill, so that everyone is reading the same thing on grade level. About third to half of the reading instruction in this teacher's class employs the anthology; for the remainder of the time, he relies on the use of other materials including trade books, non-fiction selections, and books chosen by the student based on topical studies like biography or a favorite book.

The students have been developing independent reading skills by employing the reciprocal reading method. This method consists of a seven-step process to examine literature facilitated in a group by a student leader. Each group is given a set of Reciprocal Teaching Cards containing cues to guide the activities:

1. Team decides which pages/paragraphs will be read.
   Leader says: "Please read pages paragraphs ___ to ___."
   "Look at pictures on these pages."

2. Leader says: "I predict that this section will be about _____."
   "Does anyone else have a different prediction?"
   "Explain why you made this prediction."
   (Encourage students to speak . . . even call their names.)

3. Leader says: "Please read silently to the point that we all selected and be prepared for discussion."

4. Leader says: "Are there any words or phrases you thought were especially difficult or interesting?"
   Invite team members to join in discussion.

5. Leader says: "Are there any ideas, situations, or thoughts you found interesting or puzzling? What questions do you have?"
   Invite group to contribute.

6. Leader says: "Did you notice connections to your life that you would like to share? Did you notice any comparisons to other stories or books that you would like to mention?"

7. Leader says: "Let me summarize in two or three sentences what this section was about _____. Would someone like to add anything?"

The first 3 cards are to be completed before reading the selection, while the remaining 4 are completed after all group members have finished reading the selection.

According to PS, the purpose of the first 7 or 8 lessons of this unit is to train students in the reciprocal reading technique so that once it is familiar, it can become the foundation upon which he can build other reading strategies and methods for examining literature. Examples of these strategies and methods include explorations of various genres of writing (mysteries, biographies, fairy tales, etc.), written responses to literature, and vocabulary development. Throughout the training, the students will work in the same mixed-ability groups, consisting of a talented reader as discussion leader, at least one low student, and at least one average reader. However, once the training has been completed, PS indicated that the students are flexibly grouped, allowing him to tailor the instruction to the needs or interests of his students with the eventual goal of working in small groups or pairs.

As part of the initial training, PS spent several class periods modeling group questioning techniques and examining group expectations. Therefore, this morning's lesson begins with a 14-minute evaluative discussion of the previous day's group work. With a warm smile, PS points out that he saw many good things going on in the groups and that every time the class practices reciprocal reading, he notes improvement. Continuing, he asks the panel of leaders to share their impressions about how the group work is progressing, reminding students to focus on their own groups without mentioning the names of specific students. Four of the five leaders quietly express concerns that some members of their group are talking too much. Not only is this perceived as a problem that keeps the leader from doing his or her job, the student leaders also hypothesize that it is slowing group progress and preventing everyone from receiving a fair chance to participate. With the attention of the entire class turned to the problem, PS artfully questions the five leaders to guide them through a problem-solving discussion about their possible alternatives when faced with this dilemma. Eventually, while the group of students on the rug watches with interest, the leaders decide that the best solution is to discuss a potential problem in the group, while maintaining the option of consulting the teacher should disruption continue.

As the teacher continues to guide the evaluation, students touch upon the topics of why a group member may be reluctant to participate and how he or she should respond in that situation, what to do if no one has an answer, and examples of how to encourage group members to do their best. PS praised one group because he overheard comments like, "Good answer" and "You're close." "Can anyone help them with that answer?" reminding students that, "Those are the things that make a group work well." As the discussion is concluding, a woman joins the classroom, sharing subtle, quiet greetings with some of the students seated on the rug. Although Ms. G is a special education resource teacher for third grade, she explains that she does not target particular students, but focuses on supporting the teacher and writing instruction within the regular classroom.

After the evaluative discussion, the children break up into small groups and return to the same location as the previous day to continue reading the story *Patchwork Quilt*. There are five groups, each led by one of the talented readers who took part in the previous "panel discussion." Two groups of 4 students spread themselves across a group of desks in the classroom while a third group with 5 students commandeers the director's chair for the group leader with a surrounding circle of chairs for the rest of the group. In the hall across from a graphical display showing the number of books read by each student in a fifth grade reading class, 2 more groups of 5 lounge against the walls and lie on the cool linoleum as they begin work. Within 2 minutes, all the students have their books open to the correct story and are consulting their Reciprocal Teaching Cards Worksheet to begin. The murmur of children deciding on how far to read is soon heard. During the first 5 minutes, PS stopped by the leader of each group to offer an encouraging pat on the arm or a comment to guide the discussion. A colleague commented that PS makes this type of grouping arrangement work "better than any [other] teacher."

As students finish reading the agreed upon passages, many questions are overheard. "Why are they piling up the quilt squares?" "Do you know what that means?" "Have you ever seen anyone rip thread with their teeth?" "Does anyone else have any connections that they can make with the story?" Most of the more challenging questions come from the group leaders who are identified as talented readers; however, all the group members are actively participating in the discussions. At one point, Patrick, an athletic looking boy leading a group in the classroom, leans over to ask the neighboring group if they can explain a passage of the text because his group seems stuck. The boys in the other group acknowledge the question, but offer little assistance, so PS, who is never very far away, is consulted to provide further insight.

After 25 minutes of congenial, cooperative work, all the groups complete the seven steps of the reciprocal reading process. Four groups then return to step one and continue to work with another portion of the story; however, one group in the hallway appears to be losing interest in the activity, as indicated by several off-topic discussions. At this point, all the students are invited to put their books away and move to the next class activity. Once the students are working at groups of desks scattered about the room, PS compliments them on their group work for the day and reminds them that they will have the opportunity to discuss and evaluate their performance during tomorrow's lesson.

In subsequent lessons, the children were observed using similar techniques while working in the same small groups to discuss aspects of a fairy tale. Unlike the previous lesson where all the students were reading the same story from the basal reader, the fairy tales were self-selected and read as a homework assignment. One girl, who was not designated as a group leader, animatedly discussed with her group two fairy tales that she had read. Although some books came from home collections, many of the books were chosen from a classroom collection of 50 diverse fairy tales taken from the school library. Many of the tales represented traditional fairy tales such as an illustrated version of *The Emperor's New Clothes*; however, there were a number of international tales from which to choose, for example, a tale from Asia entitled *The Wise Old Woman*, as well as modern

versions of familiar stories such as the colorful *Dinorella*. Students throughout the school are taught two methods for determining the readability of their selections. The "five finger test" is used to encourage students to read the first page or page and a half of a book tallying words that they struggle to read, exclusive of names or places. If students encounter more than five such words, they are encouraged to return the book to be read later on in the year or perhaps even saved for the following year. The other readability test is entitled the "cookies and cream technique," which encourages students to examine the text and illustrations found in the middle of the book as well as those on the cover and title page to help them make a decision about what they read. Although the children enthusiastically shared the details of their own story, many students' attention seemed to stray as they listened to the descriptions of fellow group members.

Regular reading instruction in this classroom is characterized by the following practices:

1. Direct instruction at both the individual and the group level
2. Varied questioning for meaning and intent
3. Use of modeling
4. Flexible instructional grouping patterns for reading and writing
5. Reciprocal teaching
6. Readers' response
7. Guided instruction
8. Some individual choice of reading materials
9. Discussion
10. Group evaluation
11. Fostering independent thinking and learning
12. Availability of themed resources from the library to augment various curricular units
13. Instructional Cues (both written and verbal).

Reading Instruction for Talented Readers

Talented readers have some opportunities for developing both their leadership and critical thinking in this third grade classroom. With a strong emphasis on the successful technique of modeling, followed by independent practice, PS believes that students are given ample opportunity to share their talents with their classmates, first by answering teacher questions about a reading selection and then by formulating and asking questions of their fellow classmates. It is hoped that students not only challenge one another, but also cultivate a love for reading and the excitement of sharing their newfound knowledge.

In addressing the issue of talented readers, PS expressed the philosophy that he "meets each child at [his or her] level and then goes from there." Concerned that students with lower ability may become overly frustrated, he will at times choose books for them; however, he stated that he "can't pick out books for everyone," indicating that he rarely takes the time to suggest books for talented readers. Students reading at a higher level

are encouraged to explore the library where there are many more reading choices. Nevertheless, PS expressed concerns that although a student may be reading at advanced levels, he or she often is not yet prepared to understand the language and vocabulary, which in turn, inhibits reading comprehension. Therefore, one of his goals for the entire group, but especially for talented readers, is the development of a larger vocabulary for reading and writing as well as a comfort with "big words." Individual conferences and discussions appear to be a part of maintaining a reading record and provide additional encouragement for talented readers to choose more challenging reading selections.

Reading Instruction for talented readers in the observed classroom is characterized by the following practices:

1. Use of talented readers as models, leaders, and coaches in the regular classroom.
2. Individual choice, but limited guidance, for independent reading assignments.
3. Direct instruction at both the individual and group level that PS tries to target as complex rather than instruction for lower achieving students.

Summary

Talented readers in this classroom have some opportunities to further develop their reading skills. They are surrounded with a rich, engaging, educational environment that supports literacy which is supported by a well-endowed library. Talented readers are encouraged to hone their skills as leaders and coaches in modeling guided reading discussions. Although talented readers choose their reading selections, there is limited guidance steering them toward challenging reading selections.

CHAPTER 12: Strong Porter Middle School

Margaret Alexander

Demographic Information	**1999-2000**
Grades	**5-8**
Student Population	**687**
Student Ethnicity:	
Black	**1%**
Hispanic	**1%**
White	**97%**
Non-English Home Language	**2%**
English Language Learners	**0%**
Free and Reduced Lunch	**12%**

Measures of Success or Failure in Language Arts/Reading Program—1999-2000

Sixth and eighth grades students participate in statewide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. In writing and mathematics, the percentage of sixth grade students meeting the state goal is less than the state percentage; in reading, it exceeds the state percentage. For eighth grade students, the percentage meeting the state goal is less than the state percentage in reading, writing, and mathematics. In addition, the percentage of sixth and eighth grades students that met the state goal for all three tests was far less than the state. However, 99% of Strong Porter Middle School students participated in the statewide assessment, while 92% represents the state number.

Students participate in the statewide assessment in the fall of the school year. According to state standards, students who score at or above the state goal are capable of excellent work at their current grade level.

Introduction to Strong Porter Middle School

Strong Porter Middle School is newly renovated and sits impressively on the top of a hillside in a rural middle class town, a bedroom community for a Northeastern metropolitan area less than 20 miles away. The town of over 11,500 people boasts a rich colonial American history. An active local historical society has been instrumental in preserving a number of colonial homes, as well as getting a section of the town registered as an historical district. In addition, 2 state universities, one being a large land grant university with an emphasis on research and the other originally a teachers' college that has expanded, are both located less than 6 miles from this community.

Over 500 students in sixth to eighth grades attend classes at Strong Porter Middle School, which is adjacent to the community's only high school and connected to it through a new addition. This new addition, jointly shared by both the middle and high school, houses a new gymnasium, a 680-seat auditorium, music department, and a media center with a TV studio. The primary school building includes classrooms for approximately 500 students in grades K-2. The intermediate school building, recently renovated, houses grades 3-5 and currently has about 450 students using the facility.

Most of the students at Strong Porter Middle School, as well as the students attending the other 3 buildings in the district, have a middle class background. At Strong Porter Middle School, less than 3% of the students are from a minority background (American Indian, Asian American, Black, or Hispanic) and less than 2% of students in grades K-12 have a non-English language spoken at home. There are no students who are participating in bilingual or migrant education programs. Over 20% of the student body are identified as gifted and talented and are given the option to participate in a variety of enrichment programs. Identification criteria include: teacher recommendations (including a behavioral inventory called GATES: Gifted and Talented Evaluation Scales (Gilliam, Carpenter, & Christensen, 1996) and grades. About 13% of the students are identified for compensatory education. Approximately 12% of the students at Strong Porter Middle School are eligible for free/reduced-priced lunches. Consequently, the students in this community exhibit just a little socioeconomic diversity in their backgrounds.

Curriculum Specialist

The reading program at Strong Porter Middle School is basically a trade book program with a variety of readability levels for each grade and each thematic unit. Trade books are available on common themes at instructional levels, which are above, below, and on grade level. Teachers are allowed considerable discretion as to how they utilize tiered trade books in their classrooms. *The Language of Literature,* published by McDougal Littell, is used as a source of short stories and non-fiction selections that are integrated into each of the theme-based units. How many theme units are covered varies from teacher to teacher, but 5 themes would be the average number used in a typical class during the year.

A continuing push for the reading program the past few years is to increase the opportunities for students to select from the tier of trade books at different instructional levels, rather than use just one classroom novel for the entire heterogeneous classroom. When tiered books are used, gifted/talented students are encouraged to select from higher-level books and all students spend some of their time reading independently (e.g., sustained silent reading, readers' workshop) and responding to dialogue, response, and/or reflective journals. However, tiered trade books are not used consistently in all grade levels. At this point in time (2000-2001 school year), they are used occasionally on all grade levels particularly in conjunction with literature circles (described below).

All sixth to eighth grades teams participate in the small group arrangement of literature circles several times during the year. (Approximately quarter to half of the school year depending on the particular reading class.) Each member of a literature circle group (typically 3 to 6 students) rotates through a set of roles (e.g., discussion, director, connector, vocabulary teacher, visual presenter) over a series of literature discussion meetings. During literature circles, gifted/talented students often select the same books and are in the same small groups. Literature circles meet at least two or three times a week for the duration of the book. Although, the focus is on discussion, journals are

often used, too. In the seventh grade classes observed, students usually had a choice of 4 or 5 different trade books for literature circles that include books at readability levels above, at, and below grade level.

When a teacher does select one novel or short story for an entire class, it is to teach particular reading strategies, literary elements, and/or genre study (e.g., use of fiction and non-fiction together with the survival theme or compare and contrast fantasy and science fiction), as well as to work with a common theme and theme concepts. For example, the first seventh grade class observed earlier, had just completed reading a book called *The Outsiders* as part of a theme on family/adolescent concerns and creative drama during the first week in June. This novel is extremely popular with all the students and is used as an end of the year activity to explore improvisational play writing. Consequently, average or below average readers receive more guided reading assistance during the novel than stronger readers while all students are asked to develop a critical stance about the characters and events in the story.

When it is the day of a whole class discussion group, the children think about the text and the connections with their own lives. One of the most powerful ways to teach about thinking is through discussions based on books read together or through which common themes/concepts can be discussed. Children may also see the teacher model a reading strategy, such as a "think aloud." By consistently asking questions of herself, such as, "What do I think about this?" and "What is the text saying?" children began to see what good readers think about while reading. Large group discussions help students build background knowledge that can help them read the texts with more understanding.

As a culminating project for this unit, students work in small groups. Each group role-plays, in an improvisational drama style, the group's favorite event in the story. Next, each group develops its improvisational drama piece into a "mini play" (e.g., wrote dialogue, practiced) of the event from *The Outsiders* and presents it to the rest of the students in the class. This activity is an example of how the teacher utilized all four blocks or approaches of reading/writing instruction. Guided/critical reading with the novel, an authentic creative writing activity with vocabulary development, and the opportunity for individual and small group interpretation, and writing are used with the novel. Although the students are not reading a novel on individual instruction levels for part of the reading class, they are reading a second novel at their individual independent reading level for silent reading, journals, and homework. Consequently, all four reading approaches are being used simultaneously.

Besides *The Outsiders*, 2 other whole class novels (e.g., *The Acorn People*, and *The Man Who Was Poe*) are used during the school year in seventh grade. A typical seventh grade reading lesson would include 20 minutes of reading on an individually selected or a whole class novel for silent reading and a journal entry (e.g., response, dialogue, personal). The rest of the class period (25 minutes) would be for a mini-lesson on a particular reading strategy, literature circles, instruction on literary elements (e.g., characterization, story structure), while using a current reading selection from the anthology, *The Language of Literature*, a novel, or nonfiction material.

It is the opinion of the reading consultant at Strong Porter Middle School that even good readers, when they know the reading strategies for reading materials, fail to apply them in authentic reading situations. Some research also supports her opinion. Consequently, guided reading in traditional literature texts, trade books, and/or in content area textbooks would always be a part of reading instruction. As mentioned before, Strong Porter Middle School strives to develop a comprehensive language arts program using four approaches, rather than any one approach to the instruction of reading/language arts.

Finally, enrichment projects (e.g., creating a wilderness survival kit for a main character in one of the adventure novels) have been created to go with each of the seven themes in the seventh grade curriculum. These enrichment projects, for example, may include research-based projects, additional texts, student-initiated projects that may result in work with the challenge and enrichment teacher, and/or projects that are designed to specifically use Gardner's multiple intelligences model (1993). However, as with tiered reading books, the development of enrichment projects in all grade levels is generally left up to the discretion of the reading/language arts teachers.

The pull-out enrichment program is very loosely based on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997), which was adopted by this system about 15 years ago. In the interim, because of budget cuts at various times, the program has been reduced from third to eighth grades with 2 teachers and a program committee made up of parents, teachers, and administrators to a single teacher for sixth to eighth grades. The program committee was disbanded at least 10 years ago and has never been "resurrected." The program does not use talent pool instruction of Type I (General Exploratory Activities) and Type II (Group Process Skills) components. A number of high interest, small group projects are offered on a variety of topics/subtopics (e.g., ham radio, NASA student research project, Fox TV, veterans' project, drama club, sign language), which combine exploratory elements of Type I and process skills/strategies from the Type II component. However, these special projects would not be considered an equal replacement for comprehensive Type I and Type II components. The enrichment teacher estimates that approximately 30 students per year are involved in student initiated Type III projects (Individual and Small Group Investigations of Real Problems). About half of these projects are heavily technology oriented. For example, students have received numerous awards for student produced news stories that have appeared on a city TV station. Probably, the two patterns that can be identified with the pull-out enrichment program are its "implicit" roots in the Schoolwide Enrichment Triad Model and the heavy emphasis on technological skills in many of the Type III projects.

In addition, there are other teachers who offer enrichment opportunities that are extensions of their classroom curriculum. For example, an eighth grade history teacher has about 20 students a year who participate in the local, state, and, sometimes, national History Day program. The sixth grade life skills program has had multiple intelligences activities integrated into the curricular materials. The reading consultant has initiated numerous writing projects and organized student work for contests as well as a literary magazine and a drama club. However, there is no director of the enrichment program.

(It's just one of many administrative roles an overburdened director of special services is supposed to handle.) Ongoing documentation of all the types of enrichment occurring in regular, enrichment, or extracurricular curriculum programs and which comprise components or subcomponents of a Schoolwide Enrichment Model is absent. It is the opinion of the current enrichment teacher that the only way to get the additional personnel and a documented curriculum needed for a comprehensive enrichment program is for education of the gifted/talented to be mandated by the state. Consequently, as mentioned previously, in-roads are being made to infuse and or identify existing enrichment opportunities and differentiation strategies for reading/language arts. However, the process is slow because there are no curriculum specialists employed by this school system to oversee the efforts.

Efforts Toward Sustained Improvements in Reading and Language Arts

All grade levels and curriculum areas are involved in a new language arts curriculum: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing, and visual representation, which was developed using the statewide assessment frameworks, state standards, the state Common Core of Learning, America 2000, and the standards recommended by the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English. Staff members are given in-service and meet with the building reading consultant on an ongoing basis throughout the school year.

There is no district director of reading or curriculum in this small school system; although, the administration and board of education have usually been supportive of initiatives made by the teaching staff to improve the quality of instruction and materials in the classrooms. In addition, several language arts professors from one of the nearby universities provide consultation for the language arts curriculum and a professor of gifted and talented education donates her time to speak to several groups of teachers and parents on the need for differentiation of instruction in heterogeneous classrooms. Even though the new curriculum and most in-service are initiated largely because of the efforts of the reading consultant with some help from reading/language arts teachers within the middle school, this community and the neighboring university communities have provided a strong, supportive environment for these endeavors.

The reading program at Strong Porter Middle School is multifaceted and the push is for some of it to be integrated throughout the curriculum. At the middle school level, the emphasis for reading/language arts instruction is not just in the reading and language arts classrooms, but also in the instruction of reading and writing in the content areas, such as social studies and science. Consequently, the role of the reading consultant in this building is to build awareness and expertise in the instruction of reading and writing with all teachers. This is a somewhat daunting task, but a number of in-roads are already being made.

Classroom Reading Instruction in the Regular Reading Program

The overarching goal of the reading program at Strong Porter Middle School is that all students should become members of a community of readers and writers who think critically. A major aim of the program is to help students become thoughtful and effective users of language for communication and lifelong learning. To accomplish this, students need to be given opportunities to read a variety of literature, fiction and non-fiction, and to write for a variety of purposes including: writing to inform, to persuade, to inspire, and to entertain.

The general philosophy is that no single approach for the instruction of reading and writing will work for all students. Students need to have the opportunity to experience reading/writing instruction, which is multifaceted and includes: a) guided reading and critical thinking activities with an emphasis on reading strategies to improve comprehension as well as literary appreciation; b) authentic writing experiences often within the Writers' Workshop format; c) independent reading (e.g., sustained silent reading, homework assignments, readers' workshop), which includes research on topics of individual interest; and d) "working with words"—through mini-lessons and think-alouds on structural analysis, word attack skills, and the conventions of language (grammar, usage, vocabulary, spelling, handwriting, word processing).

Each of the above facets of the reading program occurs several times a week in the reading/language arts classes and, periodically, in other curriculum areas. This program is an adaptation of reading programs, such as the four block approach: phonics/structural analysis, basal, literature, and language experience/writing espoused by for K-6 with modifications for the middle grades. Different facets of this reading program are implemented using different types of grouping: large, small, pairs, and individualized instruction in flexible manners.

Seventh Grade Language Arts Classroom

The reading and language arts classes for sixth to eighth grades are characterized by two major trends. First, the instructional techniques are shifting from more traditional (i.e., large group activities, adherence to textbooks for content/literature materials) to a combination of traditional and more innovative instructional techniques (i.e., use of flexible grouping, reading and writing workshop approaches, trade books, and other supplemental reading materials). Second, there is a predominance of new, non-tenured teachers instructing many of the language arts classrooms, particularly in seventh grade. These have been ongoing trends in instruction and the changing demographics of the teaching staff over the past 10 or more years.

Students are assigned to one of two seventh grade teams; both teams are heterogeneously mixed, but one has the special education students assigned to it and the other team has the students who have been identified for a remedial reading program. Students are assigned to one class period per day for reading instruction (primarily strategic reading instruction within thematic content units designed to enrich other grade

level content—social studies, science). The seventh grade thematic units included: challenge awareness, legend, superstition, horror, survival, mystery, multicultural literature, family/adolescent concerns, and drama. Students also have one class period per day for language arts (primarily focused on instruction of the writing process within the Writers' Workshop format). Each class period is 50 minutes long. Seven teachers, one special education teacher, and one para-educator are available to instruct all of the core academic subjects (reading, language arts, science, social studies, and math). Consequently, because of scheduling limitations, some students may or may not have the same teacher for both reading and language arts and some students may or may not have block scheduling of reading/language arts periods. The reading consultant meets with many of the language arts instructors on a weekly basis to discuss language arts instruction. In addition, she conducts demonstration lessons in selected classrooms periodically throughout the year.

The reading consultant has been very effective in providing instructional leadership to the teachers of the middle school. Overall, her emphasis has been to push for instruction of reading strategies in the reading classes as well as across all subject areas. An emphasis has been placed in writing on the students' authentic writing assignments using the writing process in a Writers' Workshop format with mini-lessons for instruction in grammar, spelling, revising, and editing. Likewise, most of the language arts/reading teachers have been very cooperative about trying more innovative instructional approaches. However, class sizes may average as high as 28 students per class (the contract limit at the middle school grades), which makes implementation of more innovative instructional methods simply too time-consuming and, therefore, too infrequently accomplished, to reap the optimal effect. In other words, to design an open-ended social studies essay test, administrate it, and score it for 28 students is much more time consuming than giving a multiple choice or short answer essay test. A second related problem frequently mentioned by teachers is that new content is continually added to the curriculum, but nothing is removed. There is a real need to prioritize the content and processes included in the curriculum so that sufficient content is taught in depth instead of too much content being attempted in a superficial way.

Despite the problems, the reading/language arts program at Strong Porter Middle School is becoming increasingly more complex to meet the demand for more "advanced" literacy. Advanced literacy is defined as moving past basic reading and writing skills to being able to think creatively and critically about what is read and to utilize content material for problem solving. In addition, teachers are making in-roads to modify instruction and reading content to effectively tailor instruction to the needs of diverse subpopulations (i.e., gifted/talented, learning disabled, average students, developmentally delayed students) that are mainstreamed into the heterogeneous classrooms. Consequently, seventh grade instructional materials include an anthology of short stories and a writer's textbook both published by McDougal-Littell, each book contains supplemental materials to use to help with the specific instructional needs of diverse learners. However, there are also many trade books (paperbacks) of varied reading levels coordinated with teacher-created thematic units that are used to differentiate the curriculum in the regular, heterogeneous class setting.

Reading and Language Arts Instruction and Curriculum

The teacher was a first-year teacher, having just completed her student teacher experience in November in this same classroom and then taking over as a long-term substitute for her cooperating teacher who went out on maternity leave at the beginning of November. The reading consultant had also served as this teacher's cooperating teacher; consequently, the transitions had gone quite smoothly. In addition, although a first-year teacher, this seventh grade teacher had worked as a substitute at the middle school for several years prior to her student teaching experience, was a resident in town, and had already had three children complete middle school. Her life experiences obviously had given her many rich insights into how to teach and manage a classroom of students. Of the 4 seventh grade teachers who were instructing at least one language arts/reading class during the 2000-2001 school year, only one was a tenured, veteran teacher.

The heterogeneous language arts class was being conducted on a warm Friday afternoon, the seventh and last period of the day and of the week. Students in the class were already absorbed in a variety of activities during a work session as part of Writers' Workshop. Several students were copying work off the board. The assignment was a writing prompt to be written as if it were to be addressed to the local board of education. The prompt stated:

> The School board is considering eliminating the long summer vacation. There would be more vacations spread out over the 12 months, but they would be shorter. Decide whether or not you favor a change to a year-round calendar. Write a letter to the school board to persuade them to choose your side of the issue.

Some students were editing and doing final copies of their prompts or other writing assignments as part of the workshop. A few of the students in this class of about 24 students were reading books or organizing papers, assignment pads, or writing folders. There was considerable noise from an adjacent classroom so that finally one of the students looked at the teacher and everyone started to laugh; the teacher shut the door.

A moment or two after the teacher had shut the door because of the noise outside the room, she announced that the students only have 2 minutes to complete what they are working on (e.g., writing prompts, reading) before beginning a mini-lesson on research skills. When the timer went off, the teacher promptly started a large group activity to review the students on note taking for a research paper. A 15-20 minute mini-lesson on note taking ensued. One student asked if she could read the directions and was told "OK." (The activity worksheet came from a McDougal Littell writing series called *Writer's Craft*, page 46.) After the first direction was read, the teacher stopped to discuss with the students the meaning of the word "paraphrasing."

Directions began again and several more students took turns reading pieces of the directions. After about 5-10 minutes of discussion, the teacher told the students to complete the activity worksheet.

The classroom was very pleasant and had a few "homey" touches made by students. A bulletin board in the back of the room extended about two-third of the length of the wall. Many student activities were located on it and a side board on the inner wall of the room. Several word walls, which list important vocabulary words from some of the trade books being used in the reading class, were present on the back board. Two windows were located on a side wall that was to the front of the building and through which the buses could be seen (and heard) as they pulled up the u-shaped front driveway to the school about 15-20 minutes before dismissal. The windows had been decorated with construction paper scenes of blue and orange flowers. An old Mac computer and a new Dell computer system occupied the space in the inner wall, back corner of the room. A "book tree" was in the front outer wall corner and contained at least 50-60 paperbacks for free leisure time reading in the classroom. An oversized book holder was in the back of the room with books, such as atlases. A number of geography posters were also displayed on the back board as this classroom was also used for a seventh grade geography class. The books used for thematic units were stored in a book closet outside the classroom so that all seventh grade teachers had equal access to trade books and other instructional materials. Aqua and purple folders were stacked neatly on the back counter that housed bookshelves just below that ran the full length of the back bulletin board.

After about 5 minutes of quiet seat work on the worksheet, the discussion began once more. Several student suggestions were written on the board as they were offered. After a few more suggestions, the teacher asked them to summarize orally what they had learned about note taking. One student observed that the list of suggestions on the board reminded him of an outline. The teacher told them that they must have at least five references for their research.

During the last 5-10 minutes of the class, a few of the kids became restless. However, their attention had been very good for the last class of the day on a Friday. Together, they made a list of all of the bibliography materials on the board: title, authors, editor, publisher, date copyright, place of publication. The teacher reminded them that she would not be at school on Monday, and they would be going to the new media center to start their research project without her. Consequently, they would be responsible to have all their things organized before they went to the center.

The teacher directed the students' attention back to the worksheet for one last question. The directions on the bottom of the page concerned how to write sentences using quotation marks.

While the students completed their last question, 1 girl got up and started looking for her journal with another student's assistance. Despite the movements of these 2 girls, there wasn't a problem with students being distracted from the large group activity. One student suggested that she didn't think she or other students understood what they were

doing. Consequently, the teacher listed the sentence on the board. As they completed the quotation marks for the sentence, the bell rang, and students began to move for dismissal.

Two school days later, when next observed, the students were in the middle of conducting their research on a subject of their choice. On this day, there was a reading/language arts block during sixth and seventh periods. It was the same class of language arts students who had met on the previous Friday; and, although, the reading class contained many of the same students, the reading and language arts class rosters were not identical.

Students were already in the media center for sixth period when this observer arrived. The media center was used by both the middle and high school and consisted of a very large general reading/book room, the main part of the center, with Internet facilities and several television monitors. Separate computer, professional reading, class, and microfilm rooms as well as a TV studio and offices, were built around three sides of the general reading/book room. The fourth side offered a panoramic view out a continual wall of windows along the front of the building. The side classroom, which had windows between it and the main part of the media center, was large enough to accommodate a full size class of students. This day about 12 students were sitting in this side classroom.

Two students were at the center table in the general reading/book room working on individual research topics. The boy worked on the topic of "wolves" and the girl had chosen the "Holocaust." Two other girls were doing research on the computer and looking up information off the Internet. Several students were in the microfilm room and were fascinated by microfiche, a new addition to the media center just this year.

The teacher told me when I spoke to her briefly during the double session that the students could select their own topic and must find at least five references. The teacher was focused on the research process and felt what content topics the students choose did not matter for this particular project. In other words, anything that interested them and motivated them would be fine.

Students were allowed to work at their own pace. One girl sat on the floor in the back of the library looking up information in an encyclopedia. Another group of students had come in with a teaching assistant from another class and sat at a table in the central main room, moving in and working without distracting anyone.

Students in the side classroom worked with a minimal amount of talking. Everyone was working on individual projects because he/she could not have partners. Some kids sat alone at tables; others were sitting with two or three others to a table. Several girls were laughing softly. One of the girls raised a hand, said she had a question, and asked if she could come over to where I sat. She wanted to know what "speculate" meant. I told her it meant a guess about something, but she should read the word in the context so that I would have a better idea of how the word was being used. The gist of the passage from the book was that a disease was becoming identified with the homosexual population. Consequently, this trend was causing speculation as to why it

seemed to be appearing in this particular group. (The disease, of course, was AIDS.) We discussed what "speculate" meant in the context of the passage.

The students told me that their five references could all be the same kind of reference source—such as five books. The teacher later confirmed this was accurate. Since this was a Writers' Workshop project, students were allowed to select their own topics and resources. However, most of the students were observed making use of many of the electronic sources (e.g., microfiche, Internet) that were available rather than just traditional resource books. The teacher had a clipboard with a check sheet on which she recorded the progress of each student (e.g., how many references, ability to stay on task, current progress). The teacher circulated continually around the classroom and the library to see what was going on and to spot check; she asked students if they needed assistance. The flow of students between sixth and seventh period was relatively seamless as probably less than a third of the sixth period students left and the number who came into the seventh period class seemed to be of a comparable number. Students seemed interested and no one seem to get significantly off-task during the double period. Quite an achievement for the last two periods of the day!

Students finished up their research during the next few days and wrote up their results. This research activity provided opportunities for students to review research strategies/skills through mini-lessons and pursue individual interests at reading levels commensurate with their abilities. However, no additional products were made beyond written reports because it was so close to the end of the year. The teacher indicated that earlier in the year, students had had more options for communicating research that included, for example, written reports, visual displays, videotapes, and artifact presentations.

The last Friday of the school year, the seventh grade teacher whose class was first observed, used a writing activity called "Wround Wrobbin Writing Experiment" with her students. Each student had a lined piece of paper with his/her name and heading written on it. They were each asked to copy the following story starter: "I tell a lie every so often, and almost always nothing happens, but last spring I told a lie that changed my life forever. It all began the day. . . ."

Next the students were asked to write for 5 minutes and when the timer went off they passed it to the student on their right and shared what was written. The teacher also put her paper in the rotation and the process was repeated. This process was repeated four times, the last time the paper was returned to the original writer to write the ending of the story. During this time the students had worked with apparent focus, particularly considering some of the distractions observed. Since the classroom is on the front driveway, the garbage pick-up at the town hall next door was quite noticeable. In addition, this was a day that the front lawn of the school was being mowed. However, students were quite content with the activity.

At least 5 or 6 students who are identified gifted/talented were in the room, including a couple with significant behavior issues, but they seemed engaged during this

activity. About 25 minutes had passed by with no significant off-task behaviors when it was time for each student to get the story back that he/she had started and write the ending. Several questions that had been asked during the activity were about which direction they would pass their papers—left, right, in front, or behind where they were sitting or what was appropriate or inappropriate writing topics/details. For example, one student asked if he could write about a "stabbing" and he was told "no." Another wanted to write about "little bathing suits" and the class discussed whether or not it was essential and relevant to the development of the story line. (Probably not, but the phrase was more innocuous than what one might have first imagined.)

Several students had shared their work and the class was discussing the last question when the bell rang to signal the end of the period. Briefly after the class, the teacher and I discussed her efforts to give her students the freedom to write, but the need to balance it with not letting them add sexual or violent details into their stories that have "shock value," but don't really add much to the substance of what they want to write about. She felt they had come a long way since the beginning of the year and there had been just one student during this class who seemed to be testing the limits of the structure of this activity. The teacher admitted that this activity was a one day "filler" at the end of a unit on the last Friday of the year, but one that she had used before and that the students found motivating. This was a large group activity, but it also gave students the opportunity for creative and collaborative writing.

On another observation, students in another heterogeneous classroom that included about a half dozen identified gifted/talented students and a different non-tenured teacher, were observed in the process of completing a poetry project as part of the Writers' Workshop. Each individual student had to submit: a) the rubric (a student self-evaluation scoring sheet that would also be used to guide the teacher in grading the project); b) the rough draft, second draft, and final copies of his/her poetry, and; c) the questions from the peer review group in which he/she had worked. (A peer review group includes 3 students who help each other assess one another's work.) Students were at different points in this project and the teacher went over who had completed the project or at which stage each student had progressed so far. Students who had completed the poetry project were working on other writing exploration pieces as part of the Writers' Workshop format. On a back wall was a list of ideas (e.g., people, places, pictures, movies, music) for writers to use during Writers' Workshop.

As with the previous teacher observed, this teacher had word walls, but instead of being connected with reading novels, she had different root words posted that had been studied over the past 9 weeks or so. For example, one word wall was for the root "gen," meaning "birth." Listed below it was gene, eugenics, degenerate, homogenize, and generate. These word walls were used as the basis of the spelling program in this classroom. Her poetry activities illustrated another use of the Writers' Workshop format and her spelling program showed the emphasize on using word patterns and structural analysis to enhance vocabulary development.

Finally, displayed on a front chart was a "book bank"—a chart with stars indicating how many independent reading books had been completed by each of the students in the reading class. In seventh grade there is a standing homework assignment to read 20 minutes and respond in writing in a journal or on paper to be kept in a reading folder about what was read. The books are chosen by students, with guidance from the teachers, so all students have the opportunity to read at levels appropriate to their needs. Gifted students read books to challenge them, less able students read at their independent level to provide needed practice and to increase fluency, and comprehension. Books selected by students are also utilized for any silent reading activities scheduled during a class.

Summary

The observations in the seventh grade classrooms and conversations with the teachers, enrichment teacher, and reading consultant revealed a number of rather consistent patterns or emerging patterns concerning reading/writing instruction. A number of the instructional patterns offered in the heterogeneous classrooms meet the requirement for differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of the gifted/talented population. These trends include:

1. A mix of all instructional grouping patterns for reading and writing including large, small, pairs, and individualized arrangements used in a flexible manner.
2. Explicit instruction of reading/writing strategies and skills within a variety of different instructional approaches.
3. Independent writing or reading opportunities every day.
4. Tiered reading assignments in trade books (paperbacks) at different instructional levels using the same theme in reading classes. Literature circles are often the instructional technique. The reading consultant estimates trade books at different readability levels are offered about quarter to half of the time during the reading classes and for most of the independent reading assignments for homework.
5. A comprehensive language arts program that includes a variety of different reading/writing approaches (i.e., guided or independent reading, Writers' Workshop, and word attack strategies, phonics/structural analysis and grammar instruction) is used on a daily basis to accommodate different reading/writing learning styles and ability levels.
6. Enrichment opportunities integrated into theme units by teachers and a variety of enrichment activities offered through a pull-out enrichment program.
7. Opportunities to select books and conduct independent research across all subject areas (e.g., music, art, social studies, science, reading) in a new media center.

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The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
University of Connecticut
2131 Hillside Road Unit 3007
Storrs, CT 06269-3007
www.gifted.uconn.edu

Editor
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The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented Research Teams

University of Connecticut

Dr. Joseph S. Renzulli, Director
Dr. E. Jean Gubbins, Associate Director
Dr. Sally M. Reis, Associate Director
University of Connecticut
2131 Hillside Road Unit 3007
Storrs, CT 06269-3007
860-486-4676

Dr. Del Siegle

University of Virginia

Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, Associate Director
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia
P.O. Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4277
804-982-2849

Dr. Mary Landrum
Dr. Tonya Moon
Dr. Carol A. Tomlinson
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Yale University

Dr. Robert J. Sternberg, Associate Director
Yale University
Center for the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise
340 Edwards Street, P.O. Box 208358
New Haven, CT 06520-8358

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