DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 615 EC 308 104

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TITLE A Study of Maximizing the Learning Potentials of Exceptionally Gifted Eleventh Grade Students in an Advanced Track Class.

PUB DATE 2000-05-00

NOTE 84p.; Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and Skylight Professional Development Field-Based Master's Program.

PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Academically Gifted; *Curriculum Design; Educational Strategies; *English Curriculum; *Enrichment Activities; *Gifted; Grade 11; High Schools; *Independent Study; Literature Appreciation; Student Motivation

IDENTIFIERS *Curriculum Compacting

ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan for maximizing the learning potential of exceptionally gifted secondary students. The targeted 52 eleventh grade students are members of a high school American Studies program located in a community 50 miles from a large Midwestern city. The issue of unfulfilled learning potential of the students was documented through student/parent surveys, teacher observation, student journals, and parent interviews. Collected data indicated that learning potential was not fulfilled for a percentage of students in the American Studies program, all of whom were classified as gifted. Results suggest a need for implementation of curriculum compacting accompanied by enrichment opportunities for qualifying students. A review of solution strategies suggested by other researchers, parents, and students, as well as an analysis of the program setting, resulted in the modification of the Early Writers Unit of American Studies to incorporate individualized study and project presentation. In addition, the solution review prompted an offer of curriculum compacting and enrichment opportunities for qualifying students during a unit on a required American novel. Post-intervention data indicated that the highly gifted students felt academically challenged and believed they were learning new information most of the time. Appendices include surveys and interviews. (Contains 35 references.) (Author/CR)

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# A STUDY OF MAXIMIZING THE LEARNING POTENTIALS OF EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN AN ADVANCED TRACK CLASS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University and Skylight Professional Development

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May, 2000

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the students in the American Studies program; to my family, who lost me for a while; and to my husband, Bill, who is my main support system. Without them, this would not have happened.

## ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan for maximizing the learning potential of exceptionally gifted students. The targeted eleventh grade students are members of the American Studies program in one of two high schools located in a community 50 miles from a large Midwestern city. The issue of unfulfilled learning potential of the exceptionally gifted students was documented through student/parent surveys, teacher observation, student journals, and parent interviews.

Data collected from the site indicated that learning potential was not fulfilled for a percentage of students in the American Studies program, all of whom were classified as gifted. The site data, combined with a review of the research literature, suggested a need for implementation of curriculum compacting accompanied by enrichment opportunities for qualifying students. The site data and research literature also indicated the need for an increase in individualized study and project presentation by students in the American Studies class.

Reviewing solution strategies suggested by other researchers, parents, and students of American Studies, as well as analyzing the problem setting, resulted in the modification of the Early Writers Unit of American Studies to incorporate individualized study and project presentation. In addition, the solution review prompted offering curriculum compacting and enrichment opportunities for qualifying students during a unit on a required American novel.

Post intervention data indicated that the highly gifted students felt academically challenged and believed they were learning new information most of the time. The issue of an increased academic workload occurring for gifted eleventh grade students at the targeted site suggested that further research was needed to determine if the interventions helped the exceptionally gifted students maximize their learning potentials.

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# CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

### General Statement of the Problem

Highly gifted students in the targeted eleventh grade gifted program display exceptional levels of comprehension and ability, but are not challenged to their full potentials. The evidence that this problem exists for these students is derived from teacher observation, parent interviews, student surveys, and parent surveys.

### Immediate Problem Context

The targeted eleventh grade class, which is categorized as gifted by the district, is located in a public school, one of two in the district, both of which include grades 9 through 12. Within this classroom are students in a combined history and English course titled American Studies, which is team taught by one history teacher and one English teacher. The size of the group varies year to year. The 1999-00 size is 52, and the students typically meet with each teacher in smaller groups and in separate rooms. To be admitted to this program, students must carry a 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale, have scored in the 85th percentile or above on the PLAN reading test (formerly known as the Pre-ACT test), and have tenth grade teacher recommendation. Students in this class

also tend to be involved in many of the extracurricular offerings within the school such as student council, drama, band, academic team, Snowball, SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), and sports.

The high school is housed in a 70-year-old, three-story brick building located one block south of the city's oldest downtown area. This section of the city, though in existence since the mid 1800's, continues to thrive, as active businesses fill every store front and recent street renovations bring back a nostalgic look of the past. Students find themselves in a 1920's building that bridges the space between a downtown area to the north, and a residential area of well-maintained, single family older homes to the south.

According to the district's 1998 School Report Card, this site has a total enrollment of 990 comprised of 97% Caucasian, 2.2% Hispanic, 0.6% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 0.4% African American, and 0.1% Native American. Students from low income families number 3.4%. Those from limited English proficient families represent 0.3%, and the drop-out rate is 2.1%. The average class size is 20. The school's attendance rate is 93.4%, the mobility rate is 8.4%, and the chronic truancy rate is 0.5%.

Students generally carry a five class load per semester plus physical education, and 21 1/4 credits are required for graduation. The school has an eight period day and classes are 50 minutes in length. Those categorized as gifted are tracked in mathematics, science, and English classes from grades 9 through 12. All students are tracked as high, average, and low ability in mathematics and biology.

Of the108 teachers on staff in the district, 51.9% are Caucasian males, and 48.1% are Caucasian females. No other ethnic groups are represented. The average years of teaching experience within this group is 15.1 years. Of these, 42% have bachelor's degrees, and 58% have master's degrees or above. The overwhelming majority of the staff lives in or near the community served by this growing district.

## The Surrounding Community

Located in a community 50 miles from a large Midwestern city, the district sits in the county considered to be one of the fastest growing in the central United States. The district, under the jurisdiction of a seven member elected school board, a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, two principals and two assistant principals, contains two high schools of just over 1000 students each which share sports teams and many student activities such as dances, plays, and music programs. Students of particular classes are shuttled between campuses, and a number of teachers travel between schools as well. According to 1993 figures, the city in which the schools are located has a population of 18,500. In addition, the district draws from two other communities and an unincorporated area of the county which in total contain another 15,000 people. The per capita income of the community is $18,000, the median household income is $47,000, and the median housing cost is $124,800.

While the high school district's buildings are at population capacity now, the community has been generally unsupportive of secondary education as indicated by the failure of every referendum since 1971. The elementary district, which has passed two referendums in the last five years, plans to build a new grade school and modify and

expand existing schools. The secondary district has experienced failure of a referendum that has been offered twice in the last year, failing by 11 votes the second time it was offered. It will be on the next election's ballot a third time. If it does pass, the elementary district will purchase and convert the older of the two high schools to a middle school after renovation. If it fails again, the district will be faced with possible split shifts and elimination of some programs. Even if it passes, the district will be using mobile classrooms next year, since a new school would not be completed for two years. This issue directly impacts the targeted class of gifted students, as many of the programs offered to them, especially the extracurricular activities, will face modification or elimination. This possibility brings the spotlight on the importance of better fulfilling the potential of the exceptionally gifted within the classroom.

## National Context of the Problem

The issue of highly gifted students' potential not being achieved is widely acknowledged. The word that rings through the literature is "boredom" for students whose academic ability is beyond that of their classmates. In developing a course designed to avoid this problem, Stiles (1994) observed: "...those who are talented in the academic area find the work too easy. These students are rarely challenged to do work in which they can succeed and feel a sense of accomplishment, and most find the lessons boring and meaningless" (p. 8).

While there are generally varying perspectives on school reform trends to best meet students' needs, some common ground can be found concerning the needs of gifted students. A study by Gallagher, Coleman, and Nelson (1995) compared the

perceptions of educators committed to gifted programs and those of educators in middle school and cooperative learning environments, which tend to favor heterogeneous grouping of students. Interestingly, both groups "felt that the standard curriculum was *not* challenging enough for gifted students; however, the strength of this perception varied by group" (Gallagher et al., 1995, p. 68). The literature indicates that whatever the situation in the classroom, the highly gifted students' needs are not being met, and their potential is not being fulfilled.

Searching out ways to better meet the needs of all students is an ongoing concern for educators. Attention to the unique needs of exceptionally gifted students is one element of the current dialogue. Reis and Renzulli (1992) have done work on an instructional technique developed in response to Reis's conclusion that

> . . .frustration . . . exists for students who have already mastered a good deal of the material or could easily master it in a fraction of the time required by other students. These students, who are academically ahead of their classmates, are held accountable for repetitious daily requirements that often lead to boredom, underdeveloped study skills, and disenchantment with school in general. (p. 51)

Students themselves have offered opinions about their experiences in gifted or honors programs. In a study by Gallagher, Harradine, and Coleman (1997), students classified as gifted were directly asked whether their intellectual or academic needs were being met in school, or whether they were receiving challenging work. Responses by the students seem to reinforce the need for unique approaches to the issue. High

school students appeared to be the least satisfied with the situation (Gallagher et al., 1997). One particularly telling response stated:

> I was in an AG [Academically Gifted] English class last year and I think the teacher can teach better to students that can comprehend better. This year I am in honors where anyone can be. It seems to me the teacher has to waste a lot of time with unimportant matters because some not-so-bright students sign up -- high school student. (Gallagher et al., 1997, p.134)

This alludes to the issue that within gifted or honors classes, some academic inequities exist and create a hindrance to learning by some highly talented students. Tucker, Hafenstein, and Jones (1997) pointed out the need for accommodating the highly gifted:

> In Comprehensive Curriculum for Gifted Learners, Joyce VanTassel-Baska (1998) delineates three ways in which gifted learners differ: their capacity to learn at faster rates readily (Keating, 1976); their capacity to find, solve, and act on problems more readily (Sternberg, 1985); and their capacity to manipulate abstract ideas and make connections (Gallagher, 1985). Although these characteristics provide the basis for developing a curriculum for the gifted, . . . it is also recognized that not all gifted students have identical characteristics and needs. (p. 196)

The importance of discovering highly talented students' upper levels of knowledge is a challenge, as well. Students who score very high on a standardized test or a unit test, for example, are not displaying what they have learned, but, perhaps, what they already knew. Experience suggests that these high scorers might not be

achieving their potential. Reis and Renzulli (1992) pointed out that ". . . (Chall and Conard, 1991) stress the importance of a match between a learner's abilities and the difficulty of the instructional task, stating that the ideal match should be slightly above the learner's current level of functioning. When the match is not appropriate, 'learning is less efficient and development may be halted' (p. 19)" (p. 52). This less efficient learning, this halted development, this frustration, this "boredom," manifests itself within the targeted eleventh grade classroom of 52 gifted students in the American Studies class in measurable, observable ways.

# CHAPTER 2

## PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

### Problem Evidence

To document the existence of exceptionally gifted students' inability to fulfill their learning potentials, student and parent surveys were completed during the second full week of the school year. The second week of the fall term, surveys were distributed and re-collected during class to 51 of the targeted American Studies students. The same week, parent surveys were sent home with students to 53 parents, 43 of which were returned. Students completed two related journal reflections in the first two weeks of the fall term, and teacher observations were begun the first week in of the fall term.

#### Student Surveys

A survey (Appendix A) was given to 51 students in the targeted American Studies class during a class period in the second week of the fall term. There was a 100% response from these students, 34 of whom indicated that 100% of their academic classes are considered advanced or high track because each one of their classes carries a weighted grade. A weighted grade means that a B in American

Studies, for example, is entered on a student's transcript as an A. The remaining 17 surveyed students indicated that 80% of their classes earn weighted grades.

Slightly more than half (26) of the surveyed students stated that the main reason they take advanced placement or high track classes is to get into a good college. Ten of them wanted the challenge of advanced placement or high track classes, 9 said they take these classes simply because they can, 2 cited their parents as the motivation for being in advanced placement or high track classes, and 2 stated that they liked being with the people who are smarter.

Forty-eight (94%) of the surveyed students said that their advanced placement or high track classes have challenged them to maximize their learning either "many times" (25) or "occasionally" (23). Three (6%) of the surveyed students noted that their advanced placement or high track classes "rarely" have challenged them to maximize their learning. It is important to note that the comments to accompany this issue indicated that 14 of the 48 students saying that their advanced placement or high track classes have challenged them to maximize their learning "many times" or "occasionally" said this *not* because the material presented was challenging, but because the homework required was very time consuming. As one student put it, "It's not so much challenging my mind, but more or less challenging my motivation and drive to complete the mass quantities of homework, projects, and papers." It would seem that at least one third of the students surveyed feel that their advanced placement or high track classes are not so much helping them fulfill their learning potentials as much as training them in

time management. The parents of these students were also offered a survey regarding their perceptions of their students' work in advanced placement or high track classes.

Parent Surveys

The parents surveyed (Appendix B) mentioned two main reasons that their students take advanced placement or high track classes. One reason was to be challenged and the other was to prepare for college. Thirty (70%) of the parents surveyed felt that their students' advanced placement or high track classes have challenged them "many times," 11 (26%) felt that these classes did so "occasionally" and 1 (2%) felt that this happened "rarely." Three of the parents who said their students' classes challenged them "occasionally" and the one who chose "rarely" added comments indicating that their students had noticeable busy work as homework. This totals 9% of the parents who noted that their students are busy, but inconsistently challenged in their classes.

Fourteen (33%) of the parent surveys listed no assignments and/or projects for any high school class to date which their students indicated were memorable in a positive way. Twenty-nine (67%) listed one or more assignments and/or projects that their students indicated were memorable in a positive way.

The problem of the learning potentials of the highly gifted students in the targeted American Studies class not being met may be evidenced in the conclusion that, of the parents surveyed, 9% of them indicate that the learning potential of their students is not being fulfilled because their students are busy, but inconsistently challenged. In addition to the parent surveys, teacher observations were made.

Teacher Observations

There were several issues emerging through the initial teacher observations. Generally, the students in the targeted American Studies English class have shown themselves to be the school leaders. Many of them are Student Council officers and members (a student council meeting during class claims nearly a third of them each time), band and chorus and drama officers, and service organization participants. Student journal reflections, student papers, participation in class discussions, and student comments both in and out of class, pinpoint five students whose abilities are exceptionally gifted in the subject of English. These five have PLAN test reading and language scores in the highest range, demonstrate writing skills of the highest level, possess literature comprehension that is accurate, insightful, and beyond grade level, and have expressed frustration with the current challenges offered to them academically in English. From these initial teacher observations, it is concluded that at least 10 % of the students in the targeted American Studies English class are highly gifted and are not having their learning potentials fulfilled. Next, the probable causes of exceptionally gifted students not meeting their learning potentials will be explored.

## Probable Causes

To better understand the probable causes of exceptionally gifted students not fulfilling their learning potentials, it is helpful to look at the learning site situation as well as some of the professional literature available concerning this issue. The probable causes include a pre-existing social structure in the targeted American Studies class, students becoming bored because of traditional curriculum and teaching methods,

inappropriate cooperative learning techniques, diverse learning preferences among gifted students, and targeted site circumstances.

The Pre-existing Social Structure

To begin, at the problem site, the students in the targeted American Studies class have been grouped homogeneously for several years in a number of classes. This has created a preexisting social structure among these students. They well know and understand one another's leadership abilities, strengths and weaknesses in knowledge, views on many issues, discussion techniques, and so forth. This social structure can stifle classroom interaction for students who are weak in social skills such as speaking out ideas, questioning another student's opinion, leading or participating in a group discussion. Students weak in social skills might consistently defer to the opinions and desires of those with more powerful skills. A surveyed American Studies student may be illustrating this issue when having commented, "I teach myself more stuff on my own than I learn in school." The students who have experienced many classes together are already familiar with one another's approaches to literature discussions, for example, and they know one another's teacher-pleasing techniques. Boredom can set in fast, possibly for everyone but the teacher, when students hear the same ideas from their peers that have been expressed many times in other classroom experiences.

Another ramification of having a preexisting social structure is that students' development of critical thinking skills can be diminished. Students know that there will be several vocal students who can voice the critical thinking required for literature

analysis in a class or small group discussion, for instance, and they fail to exercise their own critical thinking. One student has commented more than once, ". . . we've been together since fifth grade. We know each other really well."

This is also illustrated through a teacher observation early in the school year which noted that many students in the targeted American Studies class consistently physically looked at the same two or three students whenever a thought-provoking question was asked by the teacher during class discussions. These two or three students were willing to raise their hands to answer, and consistently had insightful responses if called on. Again, by having learned to look to these powerful voices or class leaders for the "right" answers, the quieter exceptionally gifted students might not be developing their own critical thinking abilities or their social skills. A second probable cause can be explored in curriculum and teaching methods that can contribute to boredom for the exceptionally gifted students.

The B (for boredom) Factor

In addition to the preexisting social structure in the site class, a second area of probable cause deals with the traditional curriculum and teaching methods which might leave exceptionally gifted students feeling unchallenged. "One of the most persistent reports regarding gifted students' attitudes about the curriculum offered in their school is that their classes are a crushing bore. In many instances, gifted students feel that they are forced to learn what they already know" (Gallagher, 1997, p. 132). One surveyed student in the targeted American Studies class explained, " . . . in some classes I'll get something b4 [sic] anyone else". Twelve (24%) of the students surveyed in the targeted

class said that they have been bored in their high track or advanced placement classes "many times," and of these 12, 5 students specifically explained it is because they already know or are not interested in what is being presented. The 19 (37%) who claimed they have "occasionally" experienced boredom gave the reasons of irrelevant material, review of material already covered, and poor presentation. Twenty (39%) of the students said that they "rarely" or "never" experienced boredom in their advanced placement or high track classes. This information would suggest that at least two-thirds of the students in the targeted American Studies class experience boredom, and that at least 10% of the whole class named the cause of their boredom as already knowing or having little interest in the material.

The targeted American Studies curriculum has remained virtually unchanged for 15 years. Another surveyed student put it clearly: "Many times I think that because we are in advanced courses the teachers believe we enjoy work just because [sic]. Sometimes they forget to present the material in new and interesting ways." The material and activities will sound familiar to any of the students who have had older brothers and sisters in the program. It marches chronologically through American history and literature, beginning with the Native Americans encounter with the Pilgrims, and ending with the Vietnam War. This march through time can proceed only as fast as the students as a group comprehend, and often the more contemporary events are covered superficially because the end of the school year approaches. The exceptionally gifted students find themselves running in place, waiting, rather than marching through time. Reis and Renzulli (1992) noted,

> . . . frustration exists for students who have already mastered a good deal of the material or could easily master it in a fraction of the time required by other students. These students, who are academically ahead of their classmates, are held accountable for repetitious daily requirements that often lead to boredom, underdeveloped study skills, and disenchantment with school in general. (p. 51)

Three (7%) of surveyed parents indicated that their students have expressed boredom with their advanced placement or high track classes, 10 (23%) chose "occasionally", 22 (51%) chose "rarely," and 8 (19%) chose "never." Of those indicating boredom expressed by their students "many times" or "occasionally," 8 (19%) of the parents gave the reasons of the material being too easy, uninteresting to the students, or presented in an uninteresting way. Five (12%) of the parents indicating boredom expressed by their students "rarely" gave the same or similar reasons, e.g. monotony, busy work, irrelevance of material. The others added no comments. As one surveyed parent of a student in the targeted American Studies class expressed, "Boredom is something she complains about. The daily class sessions are fairly predictable -- a lot of lecturing and note taking. Unlike a college course, the high school students spend a lot of time sitting in classes."

One method of expanding the exceptionally gifted students' learning in the American Studies class at the problem site has been to provide them with enrichment activities such as book reports or research projects to do outside of class. This provision can serve a beneficial purpose, but it can also become "extra" work for students who tend to possess already full schedules and the desire to complete

assignments of high quality. These activities can, perhaps, enrich, but they may also become simply more to do. As Winebrenner (1992) stated, "Their (exceptionally gifted) problem isn't that they are bored with the *content* of the material. They are impatient with the *pace*. And the choice usually offered to them -- more 'extra credit' work -- is not attractive" (p. 37). Examination of the survey question that dealt with students' dissatisfaction with the pace of learning in the advance placement or high track classes presented a rather complicated result. Seven (14%) said they were dissatisfied with the pace "many times," but within these 7, 5 (10%) felt it was too fast, and 2 (4%) felt it was too slow. Similarly, those students indicating occasional dissatisfaction totaled 12 (24%), but among these 12 students, 5 (10%) felt it was too fast and 3 (6%) thought it was too slow; 3 (6%) felt it was too variable, sometimes being too fast and sometimes being too slow. The significant figure that can be drawn from this is that five (10%) of the students felt the pace of their learning was "many times" or "occasionally" too slow. The results of this student survey indicated that the problem of not fulfilling their learning potentials exists for at least 10% of the students in the targeted American Studies class.

Regarding the students expressing dissatisfaction with the pace of their learning, zero parents said it was "many times," 13 (30%) said "occasionally," 19 (44%) said "rarely," and 11 (26%) said "never." Seven of the 13 who chose "occasionally" commented that their students said the pace was too fast; one of these 13 said that the student noted that, "sometimes too much time was spent on one topic." One parent

who chose "rarely" commented that, "It is hard to distinguish between busy and challenged."

Offering other ways of looking at the same material through enrichment or repetitive lessons might not stretch the exceptionally gifted students' learning potentials. As Stiles (1994) stated, "Traditional teaching methods often short-change students at both ends of the academic scale . . . those who are talented find the work too easy. These students are rarely challenged to do work in which they can succeed and feel a sense of accomplishment, and most find the lessons boring and meaningless" (p. 8). Another surveyed student in the targeted American Studies class stated, "Frequently my work load is at a challenging level as far as staying up until the morning to finish. As for challenging my mind and not just my ability to survive with very little sleep, that doesn't occur as much."

The reading levels of gifted students offer curriculum planning challenges. Gifted students usually are far above grade level in their reading ability, and exceptionally gifted students can display the ability to speed read or seemingly devour reading material. This holds the potential for boredom if all students are required to read the same novel at the same pace, for example, and then complete activities and discussion related to the novel. The exceptional students may find that the novels required are not at their interest level or are below their comprehension abilities. Collins and Aiex (1995) purported that ". . . a reading program for gifted readers should include a variety of reading materials and strategies which are based on the present needs and demands of the reader, not on the chronological age or grade level" (paragraph 2). Thus, juniors in

the targeted American Studies class may not be finding challenges in the required reading offerings. A third probable cause involves inappropriate cooperative learning techniques.

Inappropriate Cooperative Learning Techniques

A third probable cause includes the fact that several cooperative group projects are part of the methodology employed in the targeted class throughout the school year. Grouping students who are considered a homogeneous group can present some challenges to the teachers working with cooperative groups. He or she must address the danger of exceptionally gifted students assuming roles that are unproductive to the fulfillment of everyone's learning potential. Exceptionally gifted students often have little patience with students who do not have the desire to produce high caliber work in a group, and, at the same time, they are not happy having to carry the load that is dropped in their laps by other students. As Matthews (1992) noted, " . . . concern with quality many times causes gifted students to dominate the group or to do all the work themselves. Many students are troubled about this" (p. 48). At the problem site, the fact that these students know one another so well again contributes to the levels of discontent when working in cooperative groups. Students in a group will often place the burden of knowledge-generation on the students they know will produce an excellent response, and this is often the exceptionally gifted students.

In addition, a pale formal commitment to staff instruction of cooperative learning strategies at the problem site negatively affects the overall cooperative learning experiences of gifted students. One half hour of an inservice has been devoted to the

issue in the last five years. As one teacher put it, " I am concerned that some teachers use group work and call it CL (cooperative learning) without building in the appropriate skills" (Gallagher, Coleman, & Nelson. 1993, p. 75). Teachers' use of cooperative groups at the target site has evolved into many different method interpretations by the general teaching staff, some of which can burden the exceptionally gifted. As Coleman, Gallagher, and Nelson (1993) observed, "Gifted students resent being the 'junior teacher'" (p. 24). They are sometimes perceived to be enjoying being the leader, but these researchers discovered that cooperative learning situations can put exceptionally gifted students in positions with which they are not always comfortable (Coleman et al., 1993). Placing exceptionally gifted students with students who are talented, diligent, and possessing excellent study skills does not necessarily fit the model of homogeneous grouping, though it is considered so at the problem site. As Matthews (1992) pointed out,

> Rather than evoking the positive attitudes and appropriate social skill behaviors . . . cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups appears to promote some arrogance, a lack of trust in classmates (to do the work to the standards of excellence gifted students feel are necessary), a tendency to take over the group rather than to provide shared leadership, and a lack of knowledge about how to work with other students (how to explain material to others so they will understand. (p. 49)

Tied to inappropriate cooperative learning techniques, a fourth probable cause surfaces when noting the diverse learning preferences among gifted students.

Diverse Learning Preferences Among Gifted Students

A fourth probable cause comes to light when attempting to unify diverse learning preferences among gifted students. This, too, affects fulfillment of their learning potentials. "A different way to learn is what the kids are calling for . . . All of them are talking about how our one-size-fits-all delivery system -- which mandates that everyone learn the same thing at the same time, no matter what their individual needs -- has failed them" (Sarason as cited by Tomlinson, 1999, p. 1). Most of the students at the problem site display an innate love of learning, but their approaches to learning can be as different as their personalities. As Winebrenner (1992) noted, "Gifted students tend to get passionately interested in topics that are not connected with the curriculum, and that is one reason why school is so inadequate for them" (p. 51).

Exceptionally gifted students sometimes possess minds that work in ways beyond their years, and yet they are still adolescents. Richards (1993), a teacher of gifted students, observed, "I began to realize that what I was witnessing was students that had teenage bodies with adult heads" (p. 28). These students are not necessarily aware of the processes they use to gather knowledge, and they can seem to surprise themselves, as well as those observing them, by displaying amazing intuition. They just know things. "Highly gifted children often surprise adults by arriving at insightful conclusions without being able to describe the steps they took to get there" (Silverman as cited by Gross, 1993, p. 131).

Data shows that gifted high school students possess a unique set of learning styles when compared to other high school students, and some generalizations can be

made about their preferences. A Young and McIntyre (1992) study found that when comparing the learning styles of high school students, " gifted high (school) [sic] students. . . preferred informal design, had high motivation, were teacher- and parent-motivated, preferred to learn alone, and did not want authority figures present " (as cited by Pyryt, et al., 1998, paragraph 2). If these learning styles are not addressed, exceptionally gifted students' learning potentials could remain unfulfilled. In addition to the above issues, the circumstances at the site itself affect the problem of fulfilling the learning potentials of the exceptionally gifted students in the targeted American Studies class.

Site Circumstances

Finally, a fifth probable cause concerns the problem site itself containing circumstances which may inhibit innovation and development of gifted programs. While Gallagher, et al. (1995) pointed out the importance of input from the teachers of the gifted when designing reform, the time and money available to facilitate coordination of reform of gifted instruction in and across the curriculum at the problem site is limited. There is no full-time department chair or curriculum director to guide curriculum reform school wide. The current gifted program coordinator is also the assistant principal, who must search for time to assist teachers of gifted students with resources, innovative methods, and approaches to teaching gifted students. Gallagher, et al. (1995) suggested that reform must occur and stated that " . . . there has been clear warning that our most gifted and talented students are one group that has been negatively affected by the educational status quo with its lack of challenge and low expectations"

(p. 66). Changing the status quo at the targeted problem site leads to the exploration of possible solution strategies.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

## Literature Review

While meeting the learning potentials of exceptionally gifted students is challenging, the research literature suggests that it is certainly possible to influence their learning capabilities. Solutions exist to address the probable causes of a lack of fulfillment of learning potentials in exceptionally gifted students. Boredom, traditional methods of instruction, inappropriate roles for gifted students in cooperative learning, the diverse learning preferences of the gifted, and the struggle to develop and maintain gifted programs in some schools are all factors influencing learning potential for the exceptionally gifted. Though there may be one cause or several combined that form the hindrances to learning potential fulfillment, related literature shows that it is possible to positively influence learning potentials in exceptionally gifted students. This, however, requires attention to more than one solution. As Fox and Washington (as cited by Falk, 1990) noted, "A variety of program options should be designed and implemented because no single program concept can effectively and efficiently meet the varied educational needs of all gifted and talented students in all subjects" (p. 195).

The areas that will be discussed include the learning environment for gifted students, differentiated instruction for gifted students, curriculum compacting as an opportunity for gifted students, and the issue of assessment for gifted students.

The Learning Environment for Gifted Students

Regarding the learning environment for gifted students, the literature offers many sides of the issue of homogeneous vs. heterogeneous grouping for classrooms and the effects of each on exceptionally gifted students. Gallagher (1997) purported that there "seems to be good evidence to suggest that the gifted student profits from an accelerated or enriched curriculum that can only be presented in a special [homogeneous] environmental setting" (paragraph 13). The opportunity to learn sophisticated material might excite the highly gifted and leave others cold. Homogeneously grouping gifted students may offer them the opportunity to better fulfill their learning potentials. The exceptionally gifted students, in a classroom of students who value learning at similar levels, will perhaps better fulfill their learning potentials than if these students are grouped with individuals who have less intrinsic motivation to learn. According to Dove and Sweeney (1998), "Inclusion used to be associated with the integration of students with disabilities into regular educational classrooms. However the movement has grown to include academically gifted and talented students, as well" (p. 60). This move toward inclusion and away from ability grouping for gifted students may result in more frequent heterogeneous grouping of students in the educational classroom. Dove and Sweeney (1998) contended that this will be counterproductive for gifted students who have "already demonstrated academic

strengths above and beyond the achievement levels of student in the regular classroom" (p. 62).

Studies suggest that heterogeneous grouping is not the high ability students' preference for learning. According to Li and Adamson (1992), if gifted students, either girls or boys, are asked to choose their preferred styles of learning, cooperative learning, whereby students are placed in groups of 3-7 students within the educational classroom to learn and practice instruction, ranks after individualistic and competitive, especially in skills based subjects such as mathematics. Differing subject matter influences students' feeling, but overall, it seems that gifted students enjoy working individually. Pyryt, Sandals, and Begoray (1998) concluded that learning preferences in gifted elementary students show students expressing preferences for "learning alone, for being self-motivated, and for tactile approaches to learning" (paragraph 13).

Cooperative learning in the classroom, and its connection to students of high ability, is a many-faceted issue. The move to inclusion for gifted students has been encouraged by the suggestion that cooperative learning is beneficial for all levels of academic abilities. Gallagher, Coleman, and Nelson (1995) note, ". . . there has been a strong emphasis by many leaders of cooperative learning on the usefulness of heterogeneous grouping of students within these [cooperative] small groups. There is the implicit assumption that the key curriculum needs of *all* students can be met through such heterogeneous grouping strategies" (p. 67). Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) defined cooperative learning as follows: "Cooperative groups include two to five students of different ability, skill, motivation, sex or racial origin who work to achieve a single

learning goal" (p. 2). McGrail (1998) stated, "Cooperative learning through traditional heterogeneous groups is often counterproductive for high ability students. When the learning task involves much drill and practice, these students often do more teaching than learning in such situations" (p. 37). Winebrenner (1992) addressed the issue of cooperative learning for the highly gifted students when she noted,

> Many researchers, such as Roger and David Johnson and Robert Slavin, contend that all students, regardless of their abilities, realize achievement gains from participating in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups. . . . To quote Slavin: "Gifted students working in heterogeneous cooperative leaning groups are no worse off than they are in more traditional classroom." Statements such as this imply that it is perfectly acceptable to consistently place gifted students in heterogeneous groups for learning. But consider this little-known fact about Slavin's research: It systematically *excluded* the top five percent of the student body, meaning that his studies never actually included gifted students! His data, then is accurate only for high achievers, but not for gifted kids. One must also question how much learning typically happens for gifted students in *traditional* classrooms. "No worse off" is not synonymous with "better off." (p. 122)

The complexity of this issue was shown in Thorkildsen's (1994) study, whereby gifted students from an age range of 6 through 17+ years were interviewed about the fairness of communal and competitive learning. She concluded that younger students are more in favor of peer tutoring, and its sense of fairness for all, than older students are (Thorkildsen, 1994). Peer tutoring is one form of cooperative learning wherein "the

faster learners are allowed to help the slower learners" (Thorkildsen, 1994, p. 55). The older students in the same age range as the targeted American Studies class, 16 and 17 years of age, expressed an understanding of the need to peer tutor, and saw some advantages for themselves, but, overall, preferred acceleration to peer tutoring. Acceleration was defined by Heim (1998) as the situation whereby "students are allowed to progress through the grade levels as their ability takes them" (p. 137) in any given subject area. One 18-year-old male stated the dilemma:

> [Choosing between acceleration and peer tutoring is difficult because to] help the slow ones [you] hurt the fast ones. I wouldn't want to choose. They'd be [equally fair] because you're helping the slow workers come up to the level of adequacy, but you're hindering the fast worker. Most fast learners know that when they finish, they're just going to get more and more work. They'd rather go help their friends. There are pluses and minuses to both sides and they balance each other out. (Thorkildsen, 1994, p. 56)

Matthews (1992) interviewed gifted high school students who expressed the notion that cooperative learning experiences were beneficial if they were working with their academic peers. "When they work with classmates who don't care about the work, or when they repeat already mastered work, they may become frustrated and bored" (p. 49). Rogers (1993) concluded, "Concerns . . . about separating gifted students for special programs and thereby giving them no opportunities to learn to appreciate the diversity in their society must also be addressed through further research" (p. 11). Matthews (1992) suggested that homogeneous grouping and a flexible combination of

individual and cooperative lessons will enhance gifted students' abilities to gain the social skills hoped for in cooperative learning situations. While these ideas seem to favor homogeneous grouping of high ability students and a de-emphasis on heterogeneous cooperative learning for high ability students, others do not support this notion.

Johnson, Johnson, and Taylor (1993) concluded from a study of 34 high ability fifth-grade students that these students benefited from heterogeneously grouped cooperative learning situations. This high-ability group "were defined as those who were in the top 25% in reading" (Johnson et al., 1993, p. 840). They concluded that their study provides "some evidence that U.S. high-ability students achieve more in cooperative that in individualistic learning situations" (Johnson et al., 1993, p. 842). Another element of their study dealt with the self-esteem of high ability students, and their study confirmed the idea that "working in cooperative groups, as opposed to working individualistically, is beneficial for high-ability students' academic self-esteem" (Johnson et al., 1993, p. 843).

Renzulli (as cited by Cutler, 1996) proposed that "schools abolish separate gifted programs and concentrate on challenging and educating all students in regular classrooms" (p. 60). Renzulli developed the Triad Enrichment Model whereby "instruction and learning . . . are centered around three enrichment opportunities" (Cutler, 1996, p. 58) that cover students gathering knowledge, students being taught varying methods of learning, and students working in small groups to investigate real problems and actual situations. Cutler, (1996) noted that Renzulli originally developed

this model for 15-20% of the top students in a given school, but modified his thinking to call it the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). What evolved was Renzulli's belief that separate gifted programs should be abandoned in favor of the "concepts of SEM [which] could certainly benefit all students in regular classrooms" (Cutler, 1996, p. 60). The downside of this model, as Cutler (1996) noted, is that it requires tremendous teacher preparation.

In light of the conflicting thoughts and ideas concerning heterogeneous vs. homogeneous grouping of high ability students, compromises and suggested solutions do exist. As Renzulli (as cited in Falk, 1990) stated, "A variety of program options should be designed and implemented because no single program concept can effectively and efficiently meet the varied educational needs of all gifted and talented students in all subjects" (p. 195). Some possible options follow.

One trend seems to be movement toward cooperative learning combined with individual efforts. Richards (1993) developed a program of instruction to go beyond cooperative groups called Students Teaching Students, based on the theory that people learn best what they must research and teach to others. It is designed to extend and elaborate elements of cooperative learning and is composed of four components: research, teamwork, presentation, and evaluation. For example, first, teams of students are given topic choices for researching. Next, the teams divide up the subject matter and do individual research, learning the associated skills. Third, students are given time to work with team members to plan a presentation. The presentation component, Richards (1993) said, is the one that allows students to become knowledgeable about

other students' learning styles, a unique feature of the program. Finally, the student teams devise an assessment for the class, learning the principles necessary for effective assessment.

> It only makes sense in a world that encourages problem solving, more corporate decisions being reached through employer-employee think tanks, and doctors including their patients in their diagnoses process, that students should be encouraged to be more actively involved in their own educational pursuits, in order to make them more capable, proficient, and responsible for the employment world. (Richards, 1993, p. 29)

Another possible solution for helping exceptionally gifted students fulfill their learning potentials is offered in the idea of differentiated instruction in the classroom.

Differentiated Instruction

It has been shown to be important to challenge learners with material that is slightly beyond their level of knowledge (Chall & Conard as cited in Reis & Renzulli, 1992). This presents a challenge for teachers of students who already know most of what is being presented, or who can quickly grasp the concepts toward which the teacher is working. These students need to be challenged in ways other than those being implemented for others in a given classroom. "To maximize the potential in each learner, educators need to meet each child at his or her starting point and ensure substantial growth during each school term" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 24). A differentiated curriculum as defined by George (1990) "embodies recognition of different learning rates, styles, interests, and abilities. Curriculum differentiation aims at eliciting learner

responses, commensurate with gifts or talents" (p. 169). Differentiated instruction is one way to help ensure that all students meet their learning potentials, whether in a homogeneous grouping or otherwise. Tomlinson (1999) further explained,

> Teachers work daily to find ways to reach out to individual learners at their varied points of readiness, interest, and learning preference. There is no one "right way" to create an effectively differentiated classroom; teachers craft responsive learning places in ways that are a good match for their teaching styles, as well as for learners' needs. (p. 3)

"The literature on learning styles suggests that significant improvements in academic achievement, school attitude and behavior occur when students' learning style preferences are accommodated" (Li & Adamson, 1992, p. 53). In other words, offering a variety of possibilities for gifted students to master material may expand their knowledge at a pace that will challenge them. As Forster (1990) noted,

> To conclude that a given project is equally valuable to all students is unreasonable. Students who demonstrate accelerated learning potential require projects that have been appropriately differentiated from the regular curriculum (in which the majority of students' needs are met) as a means to achieve the objectives of the curriculum. Whether labeled as "below average" or gifted," students demand equal opportunity – not sameness. (p. 41)

Stiles (1994) offered the idea that learning for anyone will be meaningful only if it relates to our lives, contains personal interest, and if learners are actively involved in and responsible for their own learning. Students in a classroom must be aware of

standards that are attainable but guarantee high quality work as well. Learning opportunities in which students choose their own paths can offer a wide range of fulfillment of learning potentials. Stiles (1994) suggested that students have input on topics to be studied, that there be no cap on achievement, that students design their own studies and strategies, and that they participate in their evaluations. When conducting a two to three week summer course on ecology for gifted students at the University of Iowa's field campus, Stiles (1994) explained, "Their lessons included 2 1/2 hours on the prairie each day for approximately 75% of the days, the remaining time in the biology and botany libraries, and in the computer labs" (p. 9). While ecology was the topic for study, the students honed a myriad of skills in accessing data, transferring knowledge, writing, calculating, art, presentation, and social interaction. The students chose the direction of their studies. The students participated in their own evaluations. The students stretched themselves. When responding in a survey after the class ended, the students, Stiles (1994) reported, "agreed they learn more if they can choose their own topics in science (81%) and that they would rather find information on their own than have the teacher tell them (88%)" (p. 9).

Two cautions exist when creating solutions such as this to meet the needs of students with varied abilities in a class. One, things may not go well at first. Second, it may be difficult for the teacher to let go of the "sage on the stage" role in directing class instruction. Stiles (1994) noted that old habits, for both teachers and students, may be difficult to break. Teachers worry about missing some important concept or fact, and

while, the teacher's active participation in students' learning is reduced, planning and goal-setting is essential for success (Stiles 1994).

That said, Menke (1993) cautioned that educators not let students go completely off on their own. Teachers are responsible for covering the basics in a given subject area, which can be challenging when working with the highly gifted. As Menke (1993) stated,

> The more a given teacher opens the door to individual expression and to self-actualization the greater the satisfaction that is bound to be felt. The great caveat, however, is that we should not simply turn creative children loose to "go and do." Most, if not all, need or at least want the reassurance of support, insight and occasional direction. There is no question that individualized opportunities in and out of the classroom present the educator with far more work, supervision, concern and time than do the normal class exercises that everyone does together under the watchful eye of the teacher who very efficiently does his/her thing, but never considers letting the students do their thing! (p.39)

The educator's challenge is to make all disciplines relevant for the highly gifted students. Cross-curricular instruction, Dixon (1994) stated, is important to avoid having gifted students funnel all their energies into one subject area or approach to the detriment of others. A student immersed in scientific issues may lose sight of the value of basic English sentence construction.

One area of the curriculum that presents unique challenges for teachers of the gifted is that of literature. The highly gifted display reading abilities well beyond their

chronological ages early on. By secondary school, if their interest in reading has not been stifled, the highly gifted tend to display the ability to devour reading material quickly and with high comprehension. So what is to be done with their instruction? Dixon (1994) offers a seminar approach to challenging highly gifted students. In this model, the students are challenged to study and discuss works of literature in the context of historical periods, write pertinent journal topics and essays, participate in group projects, and create a culminating activity in relation to the literature one author or time period such as Dickens, 19th century Russia, or J.R.R. Tolkien. Dixon (1994) notes that this type of approach requires students possess a high development of language skills, both verbal and written. It requires a homogeneous grouping, which would allow even those exceptionally gifted in language skills to maximize their learning in critical thinking, analyzation, and critical writing.

A challenge for the educator is that this model requires a high level of knowledge of material by the teacher and, to best be implemented, some cross-curricular instruction or team leadership is beneficial (Dixon, 1994). As Gallagher (1997) said, perhaps ". . .teachers do not know or feel comfortable with these concepts themselves. Because it is foolish to ask teachers to be sophisticated in all realms of human knowledge, the only answer would be to bring together groups or teams of teachers who together provide appropriate levels of sophistication in various areas of knowledge" (paragraph 27). This issue can be challenging to arrange in some school schedules.

The writing process in particular is an important issue across the curriculum, and it can offer unique challenges to some exceptionally gifted students. Collins and

Parkhurst (1996) note that, ". . . gifted students may not necessarily be gifted writers" (p. 277). Teaching writing as a process rather than the traditional assigning an essay, assigning the topic, and assigning a due date has been established as an effective differentiated technique for students of all ability levels. Gifted students particularly can benefit from the three stages of the writing process which are prewriting, writing, and re-writing. Collins and Parkhurst (1996) explained:

> For example, a student starting a piece of writing may need assistance in choosing and narrowing a topic (prewriting). A student working on a draft needs a block of undisturbed time to compose a rough draft (writing); and a student polishing a final draft needs some feedback (rewriting). (p. 277)

Once again, the teacher must be willing to be flexible about assignments and due dates when teaching writing as a process (Collins & Parkhurst, 1996).

Differentiated instruction in general presents some challenges for educators who have been used to the more traditional structure of students seated in rows, on the same page, all the time. Tomlinson (1999) pointed out that in a differentiated classroom

> . . . an effective teacher can't afford to "be out of the loop." In a differentiated classroom, the teacher should have more awareness of what and how students are doing, not less. Teachers must look at the issue of staying "on top of" student progress in a different way. (p. 103)

Another possible solution to fulfilling the learning potentials of highly gifted students that is similar to differentiated instruction may be found in the practice of curriculum compacting.

Curriculum Compacting - Instead Of, Not In Addition To

Several observers support the notion of curriculum compacting to fulfill the potentials of academically gifted students. In this technique, ". . . the regular curriculum of any or all subjects is tailored to the specific gaps, deficiencies, and strengths of an individual student. The learner tests out or bypasses previously mastered skills and content, focusing only on mastery of deficient areas, thus moving more rapidly through the curriculum" (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992, p. 60). Feldhusen, Van Winkle and Ehle (1996) further defined curriculum compacting and its goal as follows:

> . . . a system designed to adapt the regular curriculum to meet the needs of above-average students by either eliminating work that has been mastered previously or streamlining work that may be mastered at a pace commensurate with the student's ability. A major goal of curriculum compacting is that students' time be used more efficiently on appropriate topics or activities rather than completing tasks they already know. (p.50)

Typically a student already possessing masterful knowledge of a skill or subject area is offered content that is more challenging, sometimes even in a different subject area. Setting up independent work in another subject area requires involvement of other teachers and administrators within a system who would be willing to make a commitment to curriculum compacting.

Winebrenner (1992) pointed out that not all subject areas allow the pretesting or testing out options of compacting. Rogers & Kimpston (1992) related that curriculum

compacting "results in significantly positive academic effects, especially in mathematics" (p. 59). However, literature, science and social studies in particular contain material not previously learned. Here the gifted student becomes bored, not with the material, because he or she has not previously been exposed to it, but with the pace of learning (Winebrenner, 1992). One direction curriculum compacting might take in these circumstances is independent study. Independent study might offer a study guide that follows a grade level textbook and contains built in check points, or it might offer differentiated instruction projects in the same subject area as the gradelevel textbook that contain higher levels of abstract and complex thinking. Both of these, Winebrenner (1992) stressed, must contain accountability factors for student demonstrations of knowledge gained. Independent study projects also have as an important element the study contract, usually created by the teacher and conferenced with the student, to cover the material required to learn (Winebrenner, 1992).

Another model that helps define curriculum compacting and which focuses on the reading instruction, includes the triad enrichment model which allows students to explore and choose an area of interest, learn research skills through instruction, and explore their chosen topic in depth (Levande, as cited by Collins & Aiex, 1995). An important feature of this model is that the students must create one or more products that document their learning processes. Another similar method for the teaching of reading noted by Levande (as cited by Collins & Aiex, 1995) is the inquiry method in which a student selects a topic, researches it, and presents his or her findings to other students.

Across the board, all of the literature about curriculum compacting stresses the need to offer gifted students learning experiences that are instead-of, rather than in-addition-to, the material being covered by other students. Dooley (cited by Collins & Aiex, 1995) added,

> When curriculum compacting is implemented, many highly able readers have time available for participating in a differentiated reading program. This program should not be more of the regular program. Instead it should focus on content and process modifications that reflect gifted students' instructional needs. Such modifications can give students the chance to read in depth on a theme or topic, even if it is not part of the regular curriculum. (paragraph 7)

Reis and Renzulli (1992) noted that curriculum compacting has benefited some bright but underachieving students. When they realize that they can buy time to pursue their own interests by completing regular assignments first, their motivation to do so increases. "As one student put it, 'Everyone understands a good deal!'" (Reis & Renzulli, 1992, p. 55). One more important consideration portrayed in the literature concerning fulfilling the learning potential of exceptionally gifted students addresses assessment.

Assessment

A final aspect of consideration for fulfilling the learning potentials of exceptionally gifted students involves assessment. "Gifted students, like any other students, must be evaluated" ("Teaching English," 1996, paragraph 11). Gallagher (1998) pointed out, "When a student scores at the 98th percentile on a test, that tells us only that he or she

has mastered the content of that test; it does not inform us as to the upper limits of the students' knowledge" (paragraph 4). Incorporating the assessment techniques associated with differentiated instruction, Gallagher (1998) suggests that evaluation should provide evidence that a student can exhibit change in knowledge, skills, attitude and/or motivation. To do this, traditional assessment techniques in the form of tests, might not provide the best assessment. Instead, Gallagher (1998) suggests products such as poems, paintings, experiments or class presentations; processes by which a student demonstrates knowledge such as effectively using conflict resolution with peers; problem finding, such as determining the essential issues to work on for solving world hunger; and problem solving, such as determining the possible causes and solutions for a plant which displays disease.

In addition, Gallagher (1998) and Winebrenner (1992) suggest directly asking students and teachers to self-evaluate. As Winebrenner (1992) explained, "There is growing evidence in the educational literature that self-assessment and self-evaluation are desirable for *all* students at least part of the time" (p. 118). Thus the related literature considered shows that areas that can influence the learning potentials of exceptionally gifted students include self-assessment and non-traditional assessment such as that found in use with differentiated instruction, curriculum compacting opportunities, the use of differentiated instruction, and attention to the learning environment.

Rationale for Solution Implementation

The site subject class in American Studies will benefit from implementation of several of the solutions explored. Since any change in the structure of the class has typically been in the purview of the teachers involved, methods, rather than larger curriculum changes, will be the area on which to focus. Powley and Moon (1993) offer the notion that the models found to be effective in gifted instruction, especially the instruction of English theme units, have garnered interest by all educators, not just of the gifted. Particularly, the content, process-product, and the concept models are "relevant to secondary English curriculum development" (Powley & Moon, 1993, p. 53).

Students in the site American Studies class, given the benefit of differentiated instruction and curriculum compacting may have a better chance to fulfill their learning potentials. George (1990) cautioned, "Human variation is a fascinating study and in this age of the common man we must guard against commonness" (p. 168). Applying some of the preceding solutions to the targeted American Studies class may offer an opportunity for these students to reach uncommon learning potentials, and, as Gallagher (1997) proposed, help the United States "maintain its status in the world community. This is particularly true of those students who have proved to have the strongest potential for leadership and production in the arts, sciences, [and] political life . . ." (paragraph 15). What better place to promote these ideals than in a course titled American Studies?

## Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of modifying the American Studies course to consist of differentiated instruction and project presentation of the Early Writers Unit, and, as a result of implementing curriculum compacting of the first semester Novel Unit during September, 1999 through December 1999, and as a result of revising the methods of cooperative learning used in the activities connected with the Model United Nations and a study of The Scarlet Letter, the highly gifted students in the targeted eleventh grade class of American Studies English will increase the fulfillment of their learning potentials. This will be measured by teacher observation, student reflection journals, parent interviews, student/parent surveys, and semester course grades.

In order to accomplish the targeted objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Modify the American Studies Early American Unit to incorporate differentiated instruction and project presentation.
2. Develop an assessment method, with student input, of the project presentation.
3. Create enrichment activities to accommodate curriculum compacting of the American Studies Novel Unit.
4. Continue implementation of forms of cooperative learning which contain individual components as well as group projects concerning research skills, study of The Scarlet Letter, and Model United Nations preparation.

## Action Plan

During the school year, the American Studies class meets daily for two 50 minute back-to-back sessions. In order to modify the Early American Unit and create enrichment activities to accommodate curriculum compacting of the Novel Unit, both of the teachers of American Studies, which is team taught by one history teacher and one English teacher, will meet in July to complete this work. The consent letter to parents and students will be sent home during the first full week of school in August, and parent surveys and student surveys will be distributed and collected to begin the collection of baseline data.

By the third week in September, students will be offered the differentiated instruction and project presentation on Early Writers. Along with this, the English teacher will define independent study and teach/review research skills and APA reporting form. At this point, the teacher and students will create an assessment tool for the project presentation. Weekly project checks of the students' progress by the teacher will proceed through October. The projects will be presented in class during the third week in October. Students will have completed a journal reflection connected to this project as a means of furthering data collection. Within a week of the project completion, parent conferences will allow the conducting of parent interviews by the teacher to add to the data collection. In addition, the teacher will be observing student reactions and comments of the project experience from beginning to end.

The Novel Unit will begin the fourth week in October with an explanation by the teacher of the concept of curriculum compacting, a review of independent activities, and the guidelines for qualifying for curriculum compacting. The students who wish to experience curriculum compacting and who qualify for it will begin this element. Students will complete at least two journal reflections about participating in curriculum compacting and the accompanying independent activities. Students not participating in curriculum compacting will take an exam on the Novel Unit by the first week of December, and the teacher will continue observations of reactions and effects of curriculum compacting as it proceeds.

Cooperative learning activities which incorporate individual and group tasks will be part of continuing instruction throughout the school year, especially on research skills practice, the study of The Scarlet Letter, and Model United Nations preparation in the first semester. The Model United Nations is built into the American Studies curriculum, and involves individual and partner work from September through January each school year.

## Methods of Assessment

By the end of December, to complete data collection, the parents and students will fill out the post-intervention survey. All collected data including teacher observation notes, parent/student beginning surveys, student reflection journals, notes from parental interviews, parent/student post-intervention surveys, and student semester grades will be compiled and evaluated.

# CHAPTER 4

## PROJECT RESULTS

### Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to better fulfill the learning potentials of the highly gifted students in the targeted American Studies class. The implementation of differentiated instruction, curriculum compacting in the form of independent study opportunities, and cooperative learning groups that included individual and group responsibilities were planned to achieve the desired effect.

In the second week of the fall quarter, the English portion of American Studies encompassed the assignment of an independent outside reading project (Appendix C). Students chose a novel to read independently, which had to pass teacher approval. The criteria for the selected novel required only that the selected novel truly hold interest for the student and that it be challenging for the student in some recognizable way. The teacher instructed the students to be prepared to provide justification for their novel choices. The independently completed activities for each student were designed to assist the students with evaluation of their own reading processes as well as an exploration of the elements of the novel's structure. It included a variety of activities designed to tap the use of several of Gardner's intelligences (Lazear, 1999), and the

student work was assembled in a portfolio due 10 days before the end of the quarter. The assessment of this assignment included student reflection and a rubric that evaluated the various parts of the portfolio. This independent activity was repeated, with slight variations, for the second quarter as students chose a second novel to read and study independently.

The two independent outside reading projects represent a deviation from the research action plan. Originally, the action plan called for curriculum compacting of the Novel Unit. Independent study is considered one form of curriculum compacting and seems to work more effectively for literature studies which do not lend themselves to proficiency testing since the information is not previously learned. It seemed important to offer students practice in reading and evaluating material read independently, so this course of action was implemented. The planned journal reflections connected to curriculum compacting were changed to fit the outside reading projects and the prompts did not pinpoint the issues directly related to action research, thus are not included as collected data.

Another activity connected to the study of the novel involved the reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. This novel was read by the whole class with related class work applied through out, but then the students chose cooperative groups to participate in a trial which would determine who of the three main characters had committed the greatest sin, Hester Prynne, the adultress; Arthur Dimmesdale, the reticent minister; or Roger Chillingworth, the vengeful husband. A portion of the students chose to be jurists, each of whom wrote a decision justification once the

evidence and cross-examinations had been presented. This activity had been included in the American Studies English program in years past, but, for this intervention, it was modified to better delineate the cooperative group roles. This activity was included in the intervention study also because it is unique to the American Studies English program.

The work with The Scarlet Letter, a fictional work set in early America, connected to the next unit of study concerning America's early writers, since many of the non-fiction writers to be studied were Puritans writing about their beliefs. A differentiated instructional assignment was made (Appendix D) whereby students had choices to make regarding representations of their understandings of assigned reading by Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards. The choices involved the creation of artwork, dramatic scenes, fable-writing, article abstracts, or completion of study questions. Students conferenced and contracted with the English teacher for their choices as well as due dates and assessments. Most of this study of Franklin and Edwards was done outside of class once contracts were signed, and class time was devoted to other early writers' works. The contracts included due dates for the students choosing to write article abstracts or complete study questions. The contracts for those students creating artwork, fables, and dramatic scenes included presentation dates. The work by all students was completed within three weeks.

The course content of the American Studies class at the targeted site has long contained a project titled "The Model United Nations." This project involves the pairing of students who together choose, research, and present the policies of one member

nation of the United Nations. Subsequently, each student is required to individually write and present a resolution for consideration by committees of fellow "delegates," who must debate and vote in accordance with the policies of their respective countries. The committees choose 12 resolutions that will come before the whole United Nations General Assembly to be debated and voted upon for inclusion or rejection as Model United Nations policy.

This process begins in September and culminates in the day-long General Assembly Meeting of the Model United Nations in January, during which students from another campus, who have been working on parallel activities, join the students from the targeted site, all in representative costumes, bearing their countries' flags. What was modified for this unit was the presentation and learning of research reporting and American Psychological Association (APA) publication form, new to these students, for research information. Instead of lecture relating to their Model UN projects, an assignment was created for which students had to write a short (5-page) research report on a student-selected Civil War topic. This was the chronological point for the students' study in the history portion of American Studies daily class work. The students were working on group presentations about the Civil War for their history teacher, and this writing activity was intended to expand their information base for those presentations while allowing them to discover the correct use of APA research reporting form. Time was spent in the computer lab on group instruction for validating internet sources, and students worked independently outside of class on their research reporting as contracted with their English teacher. Students shared their research information

with their peers and received feedback in cooperative groups on the day the research reports were due. This knowledge of APA research reporting was then expected to be transferred to the reporting of their research on their chosen countries of study for the Model United Nations.

A number of assessment techniques were used. Student and parent pre-intervention surveys were distributed and collected in the second week of the fall quarter with 51 student surveys completed and 42 parent surveys were completed. Student and parent post-intervention surveys were completed in the last week of January, 10 days after the end of the first semester of the school year. Forty-eight student surveys and 17 parent surveys were completed at this time. Eight parent interviews were conducted by telephone during the fourth month of school. Teacher observations were recorded weekly over a period of four months, beginning in September, 1999 through January, 2000. Added to the teacher observations of the intervention year were four teacher observations recorded during the previous year's American Studies class, as the action research topic was being decided. Intervention information will continue with the consideration of the presentation and analysis of results.

## Presentation and Analysis of Results

The intervention assessment tools included parent surveys, student surveys, parent interviews, and teacher observations. In order to assess the impact of the interventions, post-intervention surveys completed by parents and students were compared to the pre-intervention surveys of parents and students. The results of the

parent post-intervention surveys illustrate the perceptions of the parents of the targeted students as to how the learning potentials of their students were being met.

Parent Surveys

Only 17 parent post-intervention surveys (Appendix E) were collected of the 53 sent home through students. Of the responding parents, all of them felt that advanced placement classes or classes in the high track offered their students the opportunity to maximize their learning either "completely" (12%) or "adequately" (82%). One of the respondents did not answer this question. None of the parents rated advanced placement or high track classes as offering their students opportunities to maximize their learning "poorly" or "not at all."

Regarding the American Studies class particularly, the responding parents felt that this class offered their students the opportunity to maximize their learning either "all of time" (18%) or "most of the time" (76%). One parent (6%) felt it was "sometimes" and no parents chose the "never" option. Fifteen of the 17 parents responding named, among others, the Model United Nations activity as one indicated by their students as memorable in a positive way. Other activities from American Studies or other high level classes were mentioned once or twice by parents. Because of the low response rate of the post-intervention surveys it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about the impact of the interventions as viewed by parents. More telling, perhaps, were the post-intervention surveys completed by the students themselves.

Student Surveys

The targeted students, having completed a pre-intervention survey during the second week of the first quarter, also completed a post-intervention survey during the second week of the second semester of school. In the pre-intervention surveys, 67% of the students indicated that all of their classes were advanced placement or high track classes. In the post-intervention survey (Appendix F), this figure declined to 56%, a difference of 11%.

Also, the pre-intervention surveys indicated that 51% of the students took advanced placement classes to get into a good college, while the post-intervention surveys showed that getting into a good college was the reason given by only 33% of the students, a decline of 18%. Thirty-eight percent of the students said in the post-intervention survey that they took advanced placement classes to be challenged or to learn the most possible. Only 20% stated this as the reason in the pre-intervention survey, a difference of 13%. As one stated, "Even though the classes are difficult, I feel that this is where I should (be). Other classes might not be challenging enough."

The pre- and post-intervention surveys were not identical and did not seek identical information. Tables 1 and 2 list the responses to the questions posed that could be tallied in both surveys. Since the wording of the questions in the pre- and post surveys asked for slightly different information, no clear comparisons can be made. The students' comments about each of the tallied questions indicate that their interpretations of the meaning of the phrase "maximize my learning" were inconsistent. Five students added no comments to the post-intervention survey questions #3 and #4.

Table 1

Student Pre-intervention Survey Non-comment Tallies

3. I feel that, overall, my advanced placement of high track classes have challenged me to maximize my learning

| many times | occasionally | rarely | never |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | 23 | 3 | 0 |

4. I have experienced boredom with the content of advanced placement or high track classes

| many times | occasionally | rarely | never |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 19 | 18 | 2 |

5. I have experienced dissatisfaction with the pace of my learning in advanced placement or high track classes

| many times | occasionally | rarely | never |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 12 | 24 | 8 |

The students who added comments expressed feelings that were close to evenly mixed between appreciation for being challenged to learn (12) and discontent with the workload required for advanced placement classes (10). Representative of the former feeling were the students who commented, "Although there is a lot of work, if you really pay attention and try, you can learn a lot," and, "AP classes are usually pretty tough & (sic) they push you to do your best."

Table 2

Student Post-intervention Survey Non-comment- Tallies

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3. I feel that, overall, my advanced placement classes offer me the opportunity to maximize my learning | | | |
| all the time | most of the time | sometimes | never |
| 6 | 28 | 14 | 0 |
| 4. I feel that American Studies English class offers me the opportunity to maximize my learning | | | |
| all the time | most of the time | sometimes | never |
| 10 | 22 | 15 | 1 |

Those students commenting on the heavy workload in AP classes were repeating a sentiment expressed at a similar level in the pre-intervention survey. One post-intervention comment nearly echoed a statement from the pre-intervention survey: "It isn't so much the quality that affects me as it is the quantity."

One question was offered in the post-intervention survey to discover which of the American Studies activities offered in the first semester students felt had challenged them to maximize their learning. Students, in most cases, cited more than one activity, and many of them included material devised for the interventions. In fact, the top four activities mentioned were intervention-connected activities. The Model United Nations in its modified form was, by far, the most often mentioned at 63%. Its accompanying

Civil War Research project to learn APA form garnered mention by 23% of the students surveyed. The outside reading projects were named by 40% of the students, and 29% of the students felt that the character trials associated with the reading of The Scarlet Letter challenged them to maximize their learning. The differentiated instruction devised for the Early Writers unit drew mention by 19% of the students, a number 2% higher than a poetry study that was not one of the intervention activities. All other activities mentioned were not part of the intervention and in combination totaled 19%.

Four (8%) of the students completing the post-intervention survey said that none of the activities in American Studies English challenged them to maximize their learning, offering the comments, "Can't think," "It's just annoying work," "I been (sic) able to pull good grades doing a half-assed job . . ." and ". . . we have done a lot of reading, but I haven't read much." Being an anonymous survey, the identity of these apparently unchallenged students is not known and no definitive conclusions can be drawn from these comments. Another form of post-intervention data collection included parent interviews.

Parent Interviews

Eight post-intervention parent interviews were conducted by telephone during the last week in December. The purpose of these interviews, pertinent to the interventions, was to gather information about parents' understanding of individualized instruction, discover what instructional methods parents perceived as helpful and hindering to their child's learning potential, and to hear parents' beliefs on the impact of cooperative group instruction on their students. These interview questions represented elements of the

interventions devised to help students maximize their learning potentials. Each interview took between 5 and 10 minutes, and the same questions were asked of each parent (Appendix G).

Parents had varied understanding of the pedagogical definition of individualized instruction, but generally saw it as something which attempts to meet the learning needs of individual students. The interviewed parents responded that four instructional methods seemed to have benefited their children's achieving full learning potential. These included group work, reading, hands on activities (as opposed to lecture), and varied instructional methods. When asked what sort of instructional methods hindered their children's learning potentials, parents generally responded in two ways: group work where one or two of the students have to carry the load, and busy work. One parent confidently noted that nothing hinders her child's learning!

The parents interviewed commented favorably on the overall impact of cooperative group work on their children's learning potentials, but the point was made by several of them that this can depend on the composition of the group and the group's task. Two of the parents noted negative experiences for their students when the cooperative groups were in a heterogeneous classroom because their children ended up doing most of the work for their groups. The two most noted points made by all the parents interviewed concerning the "ideal" English instruction situation was that the instruction needs to have variety and it must contain activities that stretch their students' abilities. The effectiveness of the interventions can also be explored through teacher observations.

Teacher Observations and Student Comments

Weekly teacher observations continued from September through January. One of the most memorable observations occurred when the differentiated instruction unit on Early Writers was offered. The observation noted that this assignment felt good to make. Students seemed excited about the choices they had, and even in conferencing, some of them couldn't believe that they could pick their own due dates. As the projects came in, it was observed that students were interested in what their peers had created, at least regarding the more creative choices such as fables, artwork, and dramatizations. These projects were presented to classmates. Those students who chose to write article abstracts or answer study questions did not share their products with the class. The grades earned reflected a high achievement level overall with 38% of the students earning A's, 28% B's, 23% C's, 9% D's, and 4% representing two students who failed to complete the project.

The outside reading projects were a pleasure to assess. Of the 10% of the targeted students observed as exceptionally gifted, all of them displayed high levels of comprehension of their chosen novels and superior written expression of critical thinking. The highly gifted students tended to be those who, in their reflections, commented that being asked to stop and respond while reading frustrated them. As one stated, "It only breaks up the thought process that develops while you're getting involved in a book." On the other hand, many students claimed that this was the most helpful part of the project since it forced them to concentrate on the novel more than they might have otherwise. One noted, "They (written responses) helped me think more

about the book and get more out of it." The grade distribution of the two outside reading projects is also interesting. Fifty-five percent of the students achieved A's and 29% achieved B's. Ten percent earned C's, 3% managed D's and 3% failed to do one of the two outside reading projects assigned.

The quality of the Civil War research reports using the APA reporting format was generally high. The level of enthusiasm for completing these research reports was generally high as well, and by the time the final resolutions for the Model United Nations were completed, every student demonstrated correct use of APA reporting and citation form. This certainly did not mean that every student had it memorized; no one did completely; but every student was equipped to use it correctly, if that meant no more than knowing how to read the APA manual.

The trials for the characters in The Scarlet Letter brought forth challenges for the students who were not particularly vocal. Unless a student was a juror, this activity required an ability to think on one's feet, and it was observed that some students were uncomfortable with this. This activity allowed some "hitch hiking" by one or two students in each group, in part because the cooperative groups were large (6-7 students), and in part because of the distribution of the activity's cooperative tasks. Verbal reactions by students and work observed by the teacher during preparation for the trials indicated that the students who had read the novel and understood it gained the most from this activity.

The targeted students were observed to be highly motivated to produce quality work, and the higher workload associated with American Studies frustrated many of

them. Overall, the largest obstacle to fulfilling their learning potentials involved the learning of time management. Most of these students had not been seriously challenged to produce volumes of work for their classes until their junior year when most or all of their classes became advanced placement or high track classes. Then the volume of class work and homework increased immensely for most of them. For the targeted class, this frustration came to its peak the week before the holiday break when a large-group discussion (all 53 students together) had been planned to assess the work done on Model United Nations committees. The planned subject of discussion became instead a time for students to vent their feelings about the workload. "We have five classes, you know!" "We need a break. Teachers assign one thing after another. How can we be expected to get it all done?" After this class session, the teacher was approached privately by six separate students who thought there were, as one of them stated, "some real whiners in this class."

As mentioned earlier, these students tended to be involved in multiple extra-curricular activities, a situation that had not been problematical until their school workloads increased. The highly gifted students observed were experiencing some frustration with this, but continued overall to produce high quality work. After the first quarter, more of the students in the targeted class had learned to manage time, but continued to express dismay over their suffering grade point averages. In reality, most of the students had maintained high GPA's in this weighted-grade class with 11% earning a semester grade of A (worth 5 points on a 4.0 scale), 49% a B, 34% a C, and

6% a D. There were no semester failures. This leads to the conclusions and recommendations that might be made concerning the intervention strategies.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Through teacher observation, miscellaneous journal entries, verbal student comments, and assessment of student work, it may be concluded that the highly gifted students felt academically challenged and believed they were learning new information most of the time. As one surveyed student rather inconclusively commented, "I'm doing all this homework. I must be learning something." The issue of the increased workload inherent for students in advanced placement or high track classes in grade eleven at the targeted site overshadowed any clear expression of improvement through any of the data collection methods used. The workload issue should be addressed at the targeted site with communication between the American Studies teachers and the teachers of other advanced placement and high track classes.

It was noted in the post-interventions surveys that the number of students taking advanced placement or high level classes declined in the second semester by 11%. Possible explanations for this decline might include the fact that some students chose to switch to one or more average level classes, or take a class pass/fail. They may have been finding the high-level workload too intense and switched to classes with lower workloads. As one student noted on the survey, "I'm taking Art I instead of Spanish III (a course with a weighted grade). Both of these classes are normally full-year classes, but students may drop advanced track classes and replace them with regular classes as this student did. There was, however, an increase (13%) in the number of students who

said that they took advanced placement classes to be challenged or to learn the most possible and a decrease (18%) in the number who said they did so just to get into a good college. This may indicate a shift in the number of students who realize some of the positive elements of being challenged in their learning where they might not have been challenged before.

Some modifications should be considered for some of the interventions used at the targeted site. It is recommended that The Scarlet Letter character trials be revised so that everyone in the cooperative groups has more equal tasks. Student and parent interviews, and well as related literature, certainly emphasized the importance of balanced work and accountability in cooperative learning. One of the six ways to make cooperative learning more effective as stated by Johnson et al. (as cited by Matthews, 1992) included, "Encourage successful group functioning by including five conditions: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skill and group processing" (p. 50). It is also recommended that an ongoing program of staff development concerning implementation of cooperative learning techniques be created at the targeted site.

In addition, the long-term project of the Model United Nations should definitely be continued at the targeted site. This project required independent student development of research and APA reporting skills, partnered cooperative learning skills, independent accountability, and authentic assessment in the form the Model United Nations General Assembly. It was overwhelmingly considered to be the most challenging and rewarding experience of the first semester by students, parents, and the teachers involved.

The nature of the American Studies English program at the targeted site required development of curriculum compacting in the form of the outside reading project independent studies. It is recommended that this avenue continue to be pursued. The researcher agrees with Winebrenner's (1992) suggestion that curriculum compacting take the form of independent study concerning material such as the study of literature. This can be an effective way of helping exceptionally gifted students fulfill their learning potentials. As Winebrenner (1992) stated, "One thing that truly separates gifted students at any grade level from their age peers is their ability to learn new material much more quickly and to a much greater depth of understanding" (p. 37). Independent study of student-choice novels can accommodate this ability to learn more quickly and more in depth.

Also, the students who chose to write article abstracts or answer study questions during the Early Writers Unit needed an outlet for presentation of their work to their peers. Only the work of students who chose to create a dramatization, a fable, or illustrative artwork was presented to peers. The most rewarding part of the interventions for the researcher was the enjoyment expressed by many students, sometimes openly, sometimes grudgingly, of having some choices connected to their learning such as were offered in the differentiated instruction Early Writers Unit. While very time consuming to prepare and implement initially, units containing differentiated instruction seem to hold high promise for fulfilling the learning potentials of all students in the targeted American Studies program. As Forster (1990) pointed out, "Differentiation of the regular curriculum means making the curriculum different in such a way as to offer equal

opportunity to students who are exceptional, thereby allowing them to achieve all that they are able to do" (p. 41).

The goal of this action research project was to discover ways to maximize the learning potentials of the exceptionally gifted students in an existing gifted program. The interventions followed methods and programs recommended through the researcher's literature discovery, but the increased workload issue for targeted students prevented a clear picture of the effectiveness of the interventions. Although total agreement on the best methods to use to maximize gifted students' learning potentials remains evasive, the interventions employed here seemed to be headed in the right direction. In addition, it is recommended that the gifted students continue to be targeted in the educational environment. Watching these students work together for an activity such as the Model United Nations illustrated their ability to raise one another up to levels they might not have achieved in a heterogeneous environment. As Dove and Sweeney (1998) pointed out,

> How can we ignore research findings that repeatedly have revealed that gifted students benefit from special programs and ability grouping? Whether we examine research that was conducted years ago by Terman (1925), Gallagher and Gogge (1996), or Newland (1976) or current research such as the University of Virginia study (1995) . . . these reports all confirm that gifted students achieve more in special programs. (p.62-63)

Educators must continue to implement staff development which attends to the needs of the gifted and exceptionally gifted, and which focuses on the discovery of the

most effective cooperative learning techniques for gifted students. To accurately assess the impact of differentiated instruction, curriculum compacting in the form of individualized instruction, and cooperative learning experiences on exceptionally gifted students, careful attention must be paid to other factors that may possibly influence students' own assessments of their learning and cloud the picture for the educator as well. Teachers of the exceptionally gifted will find themselves challenged to create fulfilling assignments for their students that adhere to site curriculum requirements yet enable students to maximize their learning potentials.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Student Pre-intervention Survey

STUDENT SURVEY I

1. What percent of your academic classes carry weighted grades (hereafter called advanced placement classes)? (circle one)

20% or less 40% or less 60% or less 80 % or less 100%

comments/explanation:

2. State the main reason you take advanced placement or high track classes:

comments/explanation:

3. I feel that, overall, my advanced placement or high track classes have challenged me to maximize my learning (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation:

4. I have experienced boredom with the content of advanced placement or high track classes (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation:

5. I have experienced dissatisfaction with the pace of my learning in advanced placement or high track classes (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation:

6. School assignments and/or activities that have challenged me to maximize my learning include:

Appendix B
Parent Pre-intervention Survey

PARENT SURVEY I

1. State the main reason you believe your student takes advanced placement classes (advanced placement classes are defined as those which carry weighted grades or are in the high track):

comments/explanation:

2. I feel that, overall, advanced placement classes or classes in the high track have challenged my student to maximize his or her learning (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation (more room on the back):

3. My student has expressed boredom with the content of advanced placement or high track classes (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation:

4. My student has expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of his or her learning in advanced placement or high track classes (circle one)

MANY TIMES OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

comments/explanation:

5. Assignments and/or projects for any high school class to date which my student has indicated were memorable (in a positive way) include:

Other comments:

Appendix C
Independent Outside Reading Project

Outside Reading Project - 125 points American Studies, Sheehan

Choose a title (from the list or not) for me to approve. Read it and complete the following parts of the project:

1. ( 5 points) Fill out a goal sheet as provided. Hand this in on the day it is completed. Mrs. Sheehan will give you the date. When you get it back, retain it to use when you write your reflection letter and attach it just inside your front cover when you hand in your project.

2. (20 points)Ten **extended bookmarks** (#10 at the end) which have been keyed and highlighted by response type. (See over).

3. (20 points) A **vocabulary list** which includes at least fifteen words from the book. These words should be in one of the following categories:

a. new/unfamiliar to you.
b. important to the story.
c. striking or funny to you.

For EACH word you list include:

a. the word's context in the book.
b. the word's definition as it is used in the book.
b. your explanation of the reason you chose it (see a,b,c, above).
c. an original sentence using the word which clearly indicates knowledge of the word's meaning.

4. (20 points) Choose three passages from the book that you think together show the what is most notable about the story. These passages should be one each towards the beginning, middle, and end of the book. Fully explain why you chose each passage and what significant thing it illustrates about the story. Please type this one.

5. (10 points) A full-page color piece of **artwork** for your book which includes the following:

Some depiction of the main character (and other characters, if they are important)
Some suggestion of either the theme (especially if your book is non-fiction), the climax, or both
The author's name
The title of the book
Whatever else you determine to be important to communicate the book's message
In small print, your name

Use any medium to create your artwork such as original drawing, a collage of magazine pictures, found objects which can be glued or attached in some way, cut out letters (original or from magazines), a colorful computer creation, etc. Be creative and cover the whole sheet of paper in some way.

Use this artwork as a cover for your portfolio.

6. (40 points) Choose one of the general topics on the attached sheet and complete it for the title you have read. BE SURE THAT IT IS NOT A TOPIC YOU HAVE DONE BEFORE. Please type this one.

7. (10 points) A **letter of reflection** addressed to me which is typed and includes:

a. An analysis of how you met your goals in completing the bookmarks. Make connections to the completing of bookmarks and how this experience helped you understand this book. Use **examples** from your bookmarks in your reflection. Also, please decide which types of responses might help you understand a book better next time you read.

b. A one-paragraph description of your favorite part of the book. This could be a character, the author's style of writing, a significant event, something that really "got" you. Feel free to check with me if you're not sure. Include brief quotes to give me the flavor of your idea.

HOW TO DO BOOKMARKS FOR YOUR OUTSIDE READING PROJECT:

1. A bookmark should be a half sheet of paper folded vertically or a piece of note pad that will fit inside your book during your reading. Number each of these #1 through #10.

2. Divide the book you are reading into ten fairly equal sections, including one at the end, and place a bookmark at each place. Write the book title and page number on each bookmark.

3. While you are reading each section, or when you come to a bookmark, write your thoughts about that section on the bookmark. These can be brief, but should express your thoughts completely. Don't simply summarize throughout, but react to and reflect upon what you are reading.

4. Using highlighters of different colors, prepare a key that identifies a color for each of the following types of comments or thoughts you write about each section.

a. summary
b. prediction
c. question
d. personal opinion
e. a connection to other literature, or a personal connection
f. author critique
g. reflection
h. others?

********** **********

Extra Credit Opportunity (up to 10 points): Find some information about the author of the book you have read. Write a one-two paragraph brief about this person. YOU MUST INCLUDE THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CITATION(S) IN CORRECT APA FORM, OR IT WON'T COUNT. You may not use the book you have read as a source. Please be sure that you read and digest the information and put it into your own words.

**********

The following shows the grading sheet I will use to evaluate your project.

Outside Reading Project Grade Sheet

Name:_____

Title:_____

_____1. 5 points. Original goal sheet is included.

_____2. 10 points. Color artwork meets assignment criteria (5 pts.), and shows creative effort (5 pts.).

_____3. 20 points. Ten extended bookmarks included, keyed and highlighted.

_____3. 20 points. Includes the vocabulary assignment done according to directions.

_____4. 20 points. Includes at least a half page typed about three significant passages, done according to assignment.

_____5. 40 points. The typed essay assignment is fulfilled according to the directions given.

_____6. 10 points. Includes a typed reflection letter done according to the assignment.

_____ TOTAL (125 possible points)

_____ EXTRA CREDIT (10 points possible)

_____GRADE 115-125 = A 103-114 = B 90-102 = C 75-89 = D 74 & below = F

Comments:

Outside Reading Project Essay Choices - American Studies, Sheehan

Choose one of the following essay topics and discuss the topic in relation to the book you chose to read.

1. In a novel or play, a *confidant* (male) or a *confidante* (female is a character, often a friend or relative of the hero or heroine, whose role is to be present when the hero or heroine needs a sympathetic listener to confide in. Frequently, the result is, as Henry James remarked, that the *confidant* or *confidante* can be as much "the reader's friend as the protagonist's." However, the author sometimes uses this character for other purposes as well. Choose a *confidant* or *confidante* from a novel you have read and write an essay in which you discuss the various ways this character functions in the work. Do not write a plot summary.

2. Many novels or play incorporate a scene or character that awakens "thoughtful laughter" in the reader. Write an essay in which you briefly describe the scene or character, show why this laughter is "thoughtful," and show how it contributes to the meaning of the work.

3. Very often in a distinguished novel or play some of the most significant events are mental or psychological: for example, awakenings, discoveries, changes in consciousness. In a well-organized essay, describe how the author manages to give these internal events the sense of excitement, suspense, and climax usually associated with external action. Do not merely summarize the plot. Identify specific events and discuss them in light of this topic.

4. Setting, physical as well as historical, is an important part of many pieces of literature. It can influence how characters feel and behave. It can help shape events and can also help convey a theme. Write and essay explaining how the setting influences one or more characters' values, attitudes, and behavior; the way it influences the plot; and its relationship to the central idea of the selection. Make sure that you have used specific details from the novel to support your argument. To fully represent the historical setting's influence, you will have to find out information about the related time period. Please cite your source in APA form when you do so.

5. One of the most important developments to have occurred during the contemporary period has been the emergence of nonfiction as a dominant literary form. These works have a wide range of concerns and approaches: for example, social concerns, political concerns, environmental concerns, modern life in general. Each of these writers has used individual techniques to achieve his or her purposes. Write an essay in which you discuss these techniques and explain why they are successful. Make sure you ha supported your view by quoting from the work of nonfiction.

Appendix D
Early Writers Differentiated Instruction Options and Contract

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS FOR THE PURITAN LEGACY

1. ARTICLE ABSTRACTS - COMPLETE AN 8-10 SENTENCE PARAGRAPH SUMMARIZING EACH READING SELECTION (TOTAL OF SEVEN)

2. WRITE AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF ONE OF FRANKLIN'S WRITINGS AND ONE OF EDWARDS' WRITINGS. INCLUDE A COMPARISON/CONTRAST OF THE TWO WORKS. WE WILL CONFERENCE ABOUT WHICH TWO YOU CHOOSE.

3. CREATE A 1 1/2 - 2 PAGE FABLE USING AN APHORISM FROM FRANKLIN'S POOR RICHARD'S ALMANAC.

4. CREATE A DETAILED ILLUSTRATION IN ANY MEDIUM TO ACCOMPANY ONE OF EDWARDS' SERMONS. YOUR ILLUSTRATION MUST CLEARLY PORTRAY ONE OR MORE OF HIS MAIN IDEAS. MR. K WILL HELP ME ASSESS THIS ONE FOR ITS ARTISTIC VALUE. YOUR ILLUSTRATION MUST INCLUDE A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF ITS CONNECTION TO THE PIECE OF LITERATURE IT ILLUSTRATES.

5. CREATE A DRAMATIZATION OF ANY PART OF ANY WORK BY EITHER FRANKLIN OR EDWARDS. YOU WILL INVENT THE CHARACTERS, THE SETTING, THE COSTUMES, THE DIALOGUE. MRS. D WILL HELP ME ASSESS THE DRAMATIC VALUE OF YOUR WORK.

GENERAL CONTRACT CONDITIONS FOR THE ASSIGNMENT OPTION:

1. Everything written must be typed in 10 or 12 point font .

2. All student work will be completed to the best of the student's ability.

3. Each assignment will carry the same point value.

4. Extra credit may be earned, if contracted for, by presenting an oral report to the class. A written copy of this report must be submitted when the report is given.

# CONTRACT FOR ASSIGNMENT OPTION FOR THE PURITAN LEGACY

I, _____(STUDENT), WILL COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT OPTION OF _____ IN CONNECTION WITH THE READING OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND JONATHAN EDWARDS.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS ASSIGNMENT CONSISTS OF

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____.

THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL BE COMPLETED BY _____

I AGREE TO COMPLY WITH THE CLASSROOM RULES CONCERNING THE NEED FOR AN ATMOSPHERE CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING BY EVERYONE DURING THIS UNIT ON EARLY WRITERS IN AMERICA.

I, _____(TEACHER), AGREE TO ASSIST THIS STUDENT WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT IN A WAY THAT WILL HELP THE STUDENT LEARN TO HIS OR HER MAXIMUM POTENTIAL.
SIGNED:

_____ _____
(student) (teacher)
Date_____

Appendix E
Post-intervention Parent Survey

Continuing your participation in the action research portion of Bonnie Sheehan's master's degree work, please complete the following survey and return it through your student by _____. THANK YOU for your participation.

PARENT SURVEY (post survey)

1. State the main reason you believe your student takes advanced placement classes (advanced placement classes are defined as those which carry weighted grades or are in the high track):

comments/explanation:

2. Complete the following statement by circling one choice:

I feel that, overall, advanced placement classes or classes in the high track offer my student the opportunity to maximize his or her learning

COMPLETELY ADEQUATELY POORLY NOT AT ALL

comments/explanation:

3. Complete the following statement by circling one choice:

I feel that American Studies English class offers my student the opportunity to maximize his or her learning

ALL THE TIME MOST OF THE TIME SOMETIMES NEVER

comments/explanation:

4. Assignments and/or projects for any classes this school year to date which my student has indicated were memorable in a positive way include: (feel free to use the back of the page if you need to).

Appendix F
Student Post-intervention Survey

STUDENT SURVEY (post survey)

1. What percent of your academic classes carry weighted grades? (circle one)

20% or less 40% or less 60% or less 80 % or less 100%

comments/explanation:

2. State the main reason you take advanced placement classes:

comments/explanation:

3. Complete the following statement by circling one choice

I feel that, overall, my advanced placement classes offer me the opportunity to maximize my learning

ALL THE TIME MOST OF THE TIME SOMETIMES NEVER

comments/explanation:

4. Complete the following statement by circling one choice:

I feel that American Studies English class offers me the opportunity to maximize my learning

ALL THE TIME MOST OF THE TIME SOMETIMES NEVER

comments/explanation:

5. Assignments and/or activities (things done in or outside of class) in American Studies English that have challenged me to maximize my learning include:

6. Suggestions I have to help American Studies English offer me opportunities that challenge me to maximize my learning:

Appendix G
Parent Interviews

| *Question #1: What is your understanding of the term "individualized instruction"?* | *Question #2: From your experiences, what sorts of instructional methods seem to have benefited your child's achieving his or her full learning potential?* |
|---|---|
| *Giving separate one-on-one instruction. A student working at their own pace.<br><br>*The teacher trying to meet the needs of a variety of students by giving enrichment and other activities.<br><br>*The curriculum material geared toward my child and her abilities; an independent study kind of thing.<br><br>*Instruction customized to the needs of an individual child.<br><br>*Work within a classroom that is geared to each student's needs, i.e. if my child had a problem with writing she would get that in her assignments. Another child might need extra work with reading comprehension; that child would get that.<br><br>*One-on-one instruction with the student.<br><br>*Instruction directed to each student individually.<br><br>*Directed to the individual; directed to each student individually. | *When they work on things with a group; when they all put their heads together.<br><br>*Reading material helps him learn.<br><br>*My student doesn't like to sit and listen; discussion, group work when it's a homogeneous group, writing assignments, reading assignments.<br><br>*Things that are individualized give her the challenge of doing it. Things that let her figure out how to do it. Give her a goal and let her figure out how to get there.<br><br>*Hands-on, interactive, getting involved as opposed to lecture.<br><br>*Responds very well to group projects. The support of a group builds her confidence.<br><br>*Discipline -- she does her homework before she can go out and do things with her friends.<br><br>*Hands on - my student likes visualization, needs to see it, likes doing something active during learning, but just reading works well for her, too. |
| *Question #3: What sorts of instructional methods seem to hinder your child's achievement of his or her full learning potential?* | *Question #4: What is your understanding of the impact of cooperative group work on your child's overall learning potential?* |
| *When she has to do work at home, but doesn't understand a concept and has no one to ask until the next day or later.<br><br>*Group projects outside of class; considering their age and their schedules, this doesn't work well.<br><br>*Some projects where she has had to carry the ball for the group; long days of sitting in class.<br><br>*Things that are mainstreamed, which try to include everyone, bore her. | *I like that; it's been good.<br><br>*The purpose is to work as part of a team and I see the good in that, but it needs to be done well.<br><br>*In a lot of cases it's helped her learn more ways of looking at something.<br><br>*They can each work from their strengths; there are more sources to draw from and they learn to use that. It has happened for her: "So and so gave me this idea." |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Too much put on her at once to do outside of class.<br>*Busy work, repetitive work.<br>*Rote, busy work such as worksheets. She resents it and shuts down.<br><br>*Nothing much hinders my student. Whatever she puts her mind to is easy for her. | *A group project is fine, but I don't like them always studying together because of the social part. Sometimes there's more socializing than learning.<br><br>*It depends on how it's done and depends on the composition of the groups, if they're well-built. Groups are good if the grade is not a worry; learning can happen and having slackers doesn't matter.<br><br>*I have mixed feelings. It's good for them to learn to work as a team, but I have has experiences where she has to do most of the work and the grade was the same for everyone. |

*Question #5: In a few sentences, describe what you would see as your student's ideal English instruction situation.*

*She's a writer, so something where she can sharpen her writing skills. A variety of types of instruction. Any one thing could get boring. She likes to read, but wants time to do it well.

*Where he'd get a good variety of lecture, reading, tests, and papers. I kind of like how it is now at his current level of challenge. Junior High should be tougher to prepare them for high school.

*Not having it first thing in the morning! Not being lectured to, small group discussions, varied activities that would help her to get the point of whatever the subject was; an emphasis on writing.

*What she's currently experiencing in American Studies -- high interest and challenging -- making her stretch. Activities that make her try new things.

*What she's doing now is okay. I envision her doing better than I did.

*In reading, to stop and do things with the literature is very frustrating. I'd like to see more reflection at the end of the whole reading experience with personal reflection and discussion.

*I want my student to learn how to write creatively.

*The reading of literature that appeals to high school students; a lot of writing about the literature and how it applies; a quick feedback on the writing; class discussion where the group is small enough that my student would feel comfortable giving her opinion and belief; understanding a variety of views through the literature.

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