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Differentiating Up: Providing Opportunities for All Students to Engage in Challenging Enrichment Activities

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to provide voluntary enrichment opportunities for eighth grade civics students through the implementation of differentiated instruction. Findings suggest that while few students initially participated in the enrichment activities, those who did participate succeeded admirably in teaching peers about their participation. Additional findings suggest that while students prefer tiered activities, they also favor the opportunity to choose their level of participation. In most cases, when students displayed a personal interest in the activities that they chose to complete, they displayed noticeable creativity in their final product.

Students will take advantage of enrichment opportunities when they sense a personal connection or central purpose to their participation. An increase in grade average was rarely their reason for participating. Teachers should create enrichment opportunities for students to complete both in and outside of the classroom. Finally, teachers should be persistent about encouraging their students to participate in the activities.
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First and foremost I must thank the hundreds of young people who have sat in my classroom over the past 20 years. They are the ones who have held me accountable to their academic and personal growth. The students whom I have been so fortunate to teach in my career made me the successful educator I am today. I have learned so much from them and I am truly grateful, especially the students who participated in this study.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... iv

List of Tables ................................................................................................................ x

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. xi

Researcher’s Stance ..................................................................................................... 1

Literature Review ...................................................................................................... 11

  Introduction ............................................................................................................. 11
  From Seclusion to Inclusion .................................................................................. 12
  Differentiated Instruction ....................................................................................... 14
  Challenges ................................................................................................................ 16
  Mixed Ability Classrooms ...................................................................................... 19
  Summary ................................................................................................................... 22

Research Design and Methodology ........................................................................... 24

  Introduction ............................................................................................................. 24
  Setting ....................................................................................................................... 25
  Participants .............................................................................................................. 26
  Procedures .............................................................................................................. 26
  Pre-Study Survey .................................................................................................. 27
  Interviews .............................................................................................................. 28
Field Log .................................................................................................................29
Surveys/Interviews....................................................................................................31
Student Work ........................................................................................................32
Student Blog Response ............................................................................................32
Trustworthiness Statement .......................................................................................33
My Story .....................................................................................................................38
How Did I Get Here? .................................................................................................38
This Must Be The Place .............................................................................................40
Stop Making Sense ..................................................................................................45
New Feeling ...............................................................................................................49
Paper ..........................................................................................................................53
Perfect World ............................................................................................................56
Happy Day .................................................................................................................64
Life During Wartime ................................................................................................67
Don't Worry About the Government .......................................................................70
New Feeling ...............................................................................................................72
Data Analysis .............................................................................................................75
Introduction ...............................................................................................................75
Analysis During Data Collection ..........................................................................75
F – Brag About Your Proclamation ................................................... 109
G – The Interview ..................................................................................... 110
H – Take a Veteran to School Day...................................................... 112
I – My Hometown ..................................................................................... 113
List of Tables

1. Pre-Study Student Survey................................................................. 52
2. Post-Study Interview Questions .................................................... 78
3. Pre-Study Student Survey Results .................................................. 84
List of Figures

1. Pastiche poem: Exploring the classroom ........................................... 46
2. Pastiche cartoon: What I thought the students heard.................. 50
3. Kristen’s Power Point: Diamond Blackfan Anemia ..................... 60-61
4. Theresa’s Power Pont presentation: Oprah Winfrey ................. 63
5. Theresa’s interview of her mother ..................................................... 66
6. Pastiche poster: Why students did not complete activities ...... 74
7. Pastiche graphic organizer .............................................................. 80
8. Theme statements ........................................................................... 82
Researcher Stance

No male in my family ever became a schoolteacher before I chose to do it. The men in my family got their hands dirty and sweat for a living. Some were skillful enough to lead men, others just worked for or around men. I was the first male to journey into the classroom as a teacher, not exactly perceived as a “manly” profession. I was raised to always be busy because there was always something to do. There had to be something to discover, or fix, or build. I can’t remember a time in my youth when I was bored. The work ethic of always looking for something to do has followed me into my classroom. Just as Jonathon Kozol (2008) experienced parental uneasiness when pursuing the field of education, I too received the same negative reaction from family members when I announced my decision to become a teacher. “Why would you want to do that?” I was quite bluntly asked. “Because I think I can make a difference,” I responded.

As I reflect back on my decision to major in Sociology/Criminal Justice in college, I realize that I did it to fulfill someone else’s dream. I anticipated that my career field after college would be in law enforcement. For various reasons, including my inability to complete the required number of chin-ups and my failure to score high enough on the civil-service exams, the world of law enforcement never became a reality in my
life. I cannot say that I am the least bit disappointed about the outcome. Many other job opportunities did come my way. A few I would like to forget about, such as pushing around the “Flashing Blue Light of Savings” at a nearby K-Mart store and pouring molten hot iron into sand molds. Some opportunities I took advantage of and others I let pass me by, until the very last employer I worked for sold out to a Japanese firm and left me unemployed. The closing of the pulverizing company where I worked for nearly four years provided me with an opportunity to move my life into an entirely new and unexpected direction.

When the company closed and I lost my employment, I was in a state of depression and uncertainty. On several occasions my wife asked me, “What did you ever really want to be?” After some deep reflection and much thought, I finally responded, “I always wanted to be a teacher. But I was never encouraged to pursue it because it was expected that I would be a police officer.”

During each of my three years of high school, I was enrolled in a vocational printing class. In spite of my mischievous behavior, my print shop teacher always encouraged me to do more, accept a challenge, and take pride in my work. He would challenge us to design and print a playbill for the class play or instruct us to tear apart a printing press piece by piece and then put it back together. Most of the time he never told us
how to do something. He just told us to figure it out. While everyone in
the class worked at their own pace, we all seemed to learn. When the
wrecking ball came down to raze my old high school 15 years ago, some
the work he challenged me to complete was still on display in his
showcase. It was a testament to how important he viewed our hard work
and dedication. Some of my classmates recovered our old projects, which
I still treasure today.

In a lot of ways, I have always been a teacher. During many of the
jobs that I had before settling in education, it gave me great satisfaction to
train, mentor, and challenge younger co-workers who demonstrated the
potential to succeed to the next level. Two fellow desk clerks who I
trained in the hotel business did go on to be quite successful. One went on
to manage a major hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey and another co-
worker went on to become a United States congressman. I cannot take
credit for their continued success; however, I do take great pride in the fact
that I, like my high school teacher, challenged them and appreciated their
hard work.

I took my wife’s advice when she encouraged me to pursue my
goal of becoming a social studies teacher by returning to college and
completing the requirements necessary to become certified as a secondary
social studies teacher. It was painstakingly frustrating and difficult as I
journeyed into my first three years as an educator because the only position I could find was as a substitute teacher. Following several positive interviews, I felt so confident I would be offered teaching positions, only to discover later that a new field hockey or wrestling coach was hired instead of me.

Finally, a one-year substitute teacher assignment turned into a contract offer. I graciously accepted the position to teach civics to eighth graders. Thankfully, for the past 18 years I have been teaching civics to eighth grade students in a rural, agriculturally rich, middle class school.

At the start of my teaching career, students were grouped in three homogeneously academic tracks. Prompted by Public Law, 94-142 in 1975 and updated in 1990, The Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) mandated a free and appropriate education for all students between the ages of three and 21. That change to the original law brought about a dramatic increase of students with disabilities being included into regular education classrooms. It also brought about a fundamental change in the practice of mainstreaming. Karten (2005) stated that “Mainstreaming had students included in classrooms they were more prepared for. Inclusion says, let’s include students and make it work.”

From the very start of my teaching career, my classroom became immersed with the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. Along
with a special education teacher assigned to my classroom, I was expected to collaborate and develop curriculum that would benefit every student in my classroom. It was clear to me, however, that most of the collaboration benefitted the students identified as learning disabled. A student’s individualized education plan (IEP) that is developed by a selected team of educators and special education experts provides specific accommodations that I am required to implement for the education of students with learning disabilities. At the same time, one classroom teacher develops the academic planning for the rest of the class.

At the beginning of inclusion implementation in our district, students with learning disabilities were placed in the lower academic tracks. While that placement was not always appropriate, the higher achieving students were still tracked together and their instruction was deemed more rigorous. The tracking of students occurred throughout all academic disciplines. As the years went by, three academic tracks gave way to two academic tracks, and a few students with learning disabilities were assigned to the higher tracks. To their credit, some accepted the challenge of the rigorous curriculum and succeeded. Others who were placed in higher tracks to avoid discipline temptations became frustrated and were reassigned to the lower academic tracks. Today, the model of
tracking has been completely eliminated in our middle school, and full inclusion in nearly every classroom has replaced it.

My eighth grade classes today consist of students with reading abilities that range from second grade to college level, students with very little motivation and organization skills to students who are wide-eyed and are looking to soak up instruction like a sponge, and students who have previously spent their educational experience in a self-contained environment with only a few students. Some of my classes are co-taught with a special education teacher who has the responsibility to ensure that students with learning disabilities are provided with the necessary accommodations to succeed. In addition, the agricultural demographic has changed recently as a result of the migration of families from New York City and eastern New Jersey to western New Jersey. No longer is there a recognizable focus on agriculture in the school district. Many elective courses in my district have given way to remedial math and language arts instruction.

As I describe most of my current classes, it might appear that I am against inclusion. That could not be further from the truth. I have seen the look of excitement and pride when a student with disabilities becomes proficient with a never before accomplished task or demonstrates his or her highest potential. I have proudly witnessed the smiling faces of
accomplishment by students who had previously been segregated and secluded from the rest of the student population when they make a new friend in a regular education classroom or realize that their peers address the same issues and anxieties that they do.

My purpose for this study is to provide challenging and enriching learning opportunities to all students in a general education civics classroom, regardless of any prior learning label that may have been attached to them. During the past few years I have noticed a deliberate attempt to differentiate instruction that meets the needs of the lower achieving student. In my opinion, this is done in part to bring the lower achieving students over the threshold of proficiency as measured on the state standardized tests. Forgotten in this model are the students with advanced academic abilities and students who are seeking new challenges. Until last year, the percentage of eighth grade students in our school reaching the advanced level in the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) language arts has gradually decreased, whereas the percentage of students reaching proficient has shown some increase on the same state assessments.

This seems to indicate the push to get the struggling students over the state threshold has succeeded. However, any focus on improving students with advanced academic ability has weakened. Manning,
Standford, and Reeves (2010) point out that in many classrooms advanced learners are being exploited when they are expected to serve as peer tutors. Further, it reinforces my belief that teachers tend to teach to the middle of the student ability level in their classrooms, thereby, neglecting students who want to be challenged more by developing their information processing skills.

Throughout my teaching day, I see students that I would identify as advanced learners reading novels, drawing detailed portraits and cartoons, and in some cases just sitting patiently waiting for the misbehavior and interruptions to stop so they can continue to learn. I see the look on their faces and their body language. It is as though they are saying, “Teach me, challenge me, I want to learn more.” I am frustrated, like many of my students, by the lack of and continued decrease in challenging curriculum presented to my eighth grade civics students. Some might call it “dumbing down” the curriculum. The topic is a common discussion item among teachers, parents, government leaders and the media. Advanced learners who should be challenged by rigorous curriculum and prepared for advanced placement classes in high school are forced to hear the redundancy of instructions, to complete unnecessary assignments, and be exposed to disruptive behavior by unmotivated and unprepared students.
In an attempt to meet the needs of the advanced learners and increase rigor in the curriculum, I have proposed implementing honors level courses for advanced learners to benefit. My proposals have been presented to department supervisors, administrators, education council committees, and our Board of Education. Each time I have been met with resistance to create any course that resembles anything on an honors level in middle school. One administrator emphatically stated, “We don’t segregate students in our school.” This dead end has forced me to look into another direction to find a way to meet the needs of the students who want more.

I admit that I am part of the problem. The problem is that I do not differentiate my instruction to meet the needs of all my students. I can blame the school’s administration for focusing on the lower achievers and those in danger of failing. My initial conversations with other content teachers indicate that they observe the same frustrations both by themselves and by the students in their classrooms. But the bottom line is full inclusion will continue and I am responsible to meet the needs of all the students in my charge. Therefore, my research question is: What are the observed and reported experiences of eighth grade students in civics when enrichment activities are included as part of differentiated instruction?
Literature Review

Introduction

President George H.W. Bush’s signature on the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 significantly changed the way public schools address the educational needs of students with disabilities. In 2004, the United States Congress increased the provisions of IDEA to ensure that every student in public school must be provided with a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Therefore, students with disabilities that had formally been segregated from regular classrooms, were now included with their regular education classmates. From that point on, inclusion was expected to become commonplace in classrooms across the country.

Choate (1993) states that 75 percent of all students with disabilities are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms during some part of their school day. As a result, the needs of higher achieving students are not being met. Parke (1992) points out that such a situation provides a climate where advanced learners risk the possibility of failure because classroom instruction is not tailored to their individual needs.

The issue then becomes how does the regular education teacher best meet the needs of advanced learners while trying to implement the accommodations required by students with disabilities? The needs of all
students can be reached when the teacher differentiates instruction.

Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010) suggest implementing strategies such as content acceleration, curriculum packing, and flexible pacing as ways to differentiate instruction to meet advanced learners’ needs.

**From Seclusion to Inclusion**

Inclusion brought students with varied learning abilities and disabilities together in the same grade-level classrooms. Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) identify the main characteristic of inclusion as bringing services and support to the special-needs student in the general education classroom, not removing students from learning experiences with their peers. As the number of special-needs students in regular education classrooms increase, inclusive principles that enable students, teachers, and peers to fit in need to be implemented. Karten (2005) suggests increasing student disability awareness, providing activities for students who require more challenges, and differentiating content and process. Thus, both suggestions prepare all students for a successful inclusive learning experience.

The increasing numbers of students with disabilities being placed into the regular education classroom creates large ability gaps and diversity between the regular and special education students. Tomlinson et al. (2003) paint a picture of what most of today’s classrooms look like,
“today’s classrooms include highly advanced learners; students whose first language is not English; underachieving students; motivated and unmotivated students; and students with varying interests and preferred modes of learning” (p. 120). In the same way, Danzi, Reul, and Smith (2008) discovered that teachers are overwhelmed and unprepared when trying to reach the individual needs of students in a mixed ability classroom. The ability gaps within classrooms are not something most teachers have experienced in their teaching careers. One group of students whose needs have been ignored is the advanced learners. Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010) point out that most general education classroom teachers are not trained to meet the strong motivation and higher level content of the advanced learners. Added to the frustrations of trying to meet standardized test requirements, classroom teachers have lost control of how the curriculum is presented in their classroom.

Some unforeseen problems begin to occur as inclusion is implemented throughout schools. One of the problems associated with inclusion revolves around funding. Winebrenner (1999) suggests, as more students with disabilities began to enter regular education classrooms, their funding and services increase while funding for other programs exhibits a steady decrease. Not only has funding decreased, but also the attention given to students considered to be advanced learners has suffered
as well. In a study that examined perceptions of gifted students in general education classrooms, Moon, Brighton, and Callahan (2002), discovered that gifted learners resented the fact that they were not given opportunities to learn new concepts because students of lower ability slow down the pace of instruction.

Although inclusion has benefitted students with disabilities by providing social integration, it takes away resources for other students. Savich (2008) points out that one criticism of inclusion is that not enough funds are appropriated to general education to make inclusion work. If more resources are not available for all students to reach their full potential, then new strategies need to be put in place in every classroom. One strategy that helps to meet the needs of advanced learners is differentiated instruction.

**Differentiated Instruction**

“Differentiated instruction (DI) provides students a variety of options that enables them to reach success by meeting learners where they are to reach targeted standards” (Gregory and Chapman, 2002, p. x). Tomlinson et al. (2003) view DI as a necessity because it mirrors the diversity of abilities present in society. In their view, they see DI as a means to maximize learning opportunities for all students. Differentiated instruction can be a successful method to enhance student learning for
every student in the classroom. However, Nordlund (2003) points out successful DI instruction is dependent upon teachers and support team members believing that diversity in the classroom enhances learning.

Tomlinson (1995) identifies differentiated classrooms as ones where teachers create specific ways for individual student learning without making the assumption that all students learn alike. Since full inclusion has been mandated for regular education classrooms, now more than ever, it becomes necessary for teachers to embrace the diversity in their classrooms. As a pioneer of differentiated instruction, Tomlinson points out, “Effective differentiation of curriculum and instruction is proactive, rather than reactive. Teachers should plan lessons that will from the outset, address learner variance” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 131). In sum, DI is a strategy that can successfully meet the learning needs of all students in a diverse classroom. Its success is dependent upon providing options to students and relying on the cooperation of all involved.

Challenges.

While the goal of DI is to meet students where they are and tailor instruction to meet their needs, the mere implementation of it poses several challenges. Kaplan (2008) points out that significant results have been reached when implementing DI in gifted classrooms. Implementing successful DI strategies used in gifted classrooms can also be implemented
in regular education classrooms. A study conducted by Coleman and Gallagher (1992) found that programs designed for gifted students could benefit all students. These findings fall right in place with the tenets of DI. Since cooperation and collaboration is key to DI, it becomes necessary for teachers of gifted students to share their experiences with the regular education teachers.

If implementing gifted and talented methods in regular education classes raises the bar, will all the students stay engaged? Or will some become disengaged and disruptive? Research conducted by Bellamy (2005) demonstrates why students become disengaged and disruptive. In her study, Bellamy points out students become disruptive because they have not been included in the lesson and have not been provided with stimulating learning opportunities. As a result, bad behavior is not always the student’s fault. Therefore, disruptive behavior can be the fault of the teacher for not planning lessons that include DI.

Another major challenge hampering the implementation of DI, as Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) point out in their study, is that schools vary greatly in their inclusion models, hence making it nearly impossible to identify a best practice like DI. Similar results were discovered by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. During the study, the researchers concluded, “teachers make little use of strategies
(instructional and structural) that would enable the academic diversity of students to be better addressed” (Moon, Callahan, Tomlinson, & Miller, 2002, p. xiv). Although DI is a strategy that improves learning for all students, roadblocks still need to be removed.

Finally, another challenge inhibiting the success of DI is the lack of support for it from experienced teachers and lack of professional development focusing on its success. A three-year study that examined how pre-service teachers implemented or modified instruction in order to meet the needs of diverse learners found, “cooperating teachers seldom modeled differentiated strategies and often encouraged pre-service teachers to keep students together” (Tomlinson et al., 1995, p. x). Manning et al. (2010) concurred by pointing out experienced regular education classroom teachers have not been trained in DI and thus, cannot provide an atmosphere for advanced learners to thrive.

Assuming that the challenges can be overcome, what strategies can teachers implement using DI that benefits the entire class, including low to high functioning students? Lawrence-Brown (2004) identifies three qualities for general education lessons. The qualities she suggests include promoting active learning, connecting subject matter with students’ interest, and incorporating multiple intelligences. Likewise, Wormeli (2006) recommends five strategies for effective DI. His recommendations
include teaching to developmental needs, treating academic struggles as strengths, providing multiple pathways to standards, giving formative feedback, and daring to be unconventional.

Gregory and Chapman (2002) suggest another important component when implementing DI is for teachers to know their students and recognize the uniqueness of each learner. Knowing your students will help in determining their instructional needs. Nordlund (2003) recommends implementing Bloom’s Taxonomy, as a method of differentiating instruction by categorizing or adjusting levels of abstraction during instruction. Bloom (1956) provided a six-tiered hierarchal classification that addresses the way students learn. His classifications of learning begins with knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and end with evaluation. When teachers create lessons from the basic knowledge level on up to the challenging evaluation level, students will become more successful learners as they develop more higher level thinking skills.

**Mixed Ability Classrooms.**

A mixed ability classroom no longer contains students who are tracked by a specific ability level as they may have been in the past. Not long ago it was easy to identify the “A” group from the “C” group or top group from the lower group. Schools today are moving away from the
tracking model. The movement away from the tracking model has led to some resistance, however. Fieldler, Lange, and Winebrenner (2002) suggest that the movement away from ability grouping fails to meet the needs of the gifted learners. A side effect felt by gifted students who are placed in mixed-ability classrooms occurs during group work. Huss (2006) asserts that gifted students are being exploited during cooperative learning because they are often assigned as the leader of the heterogeneous groups and they rarely get to work cooperatively with students of their same ability level. Jolly (2007) notes that Whipple advocated the need for specialized instruction for gifted children early in the 20th century by suggesting gifted students should be separated from the other students.

When a classroom has such a diversity of learning abilities, how then can the needs of the gifted or advanced learner be met? One suggestion comes from a study conducted by McGrail (1998). In her study, McGrail concluded that lesson modifications, assignment modifications, and scheduling modifications are necessary for high ability learners. Likewise, Tomlinson et al. (1995) recommends preparing all students and parents for the differentiated lessons that will take place as instruction moves away from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom.
Another concern associated with the mixed ability classrooms is how to avoid or reduce student behavior that can be detrimental to the learning process for all. In their research, Danzi et al. (2008) identified problems associated with mixed ability classrooms and strategies to alleviate boredom and lack of motivation in a mixed ability classroom. Their strategies include: free-time activities, tiered assignments, and authentic assessments. Powers (2008) found that gifted learners could succeed by participating in carefully constructed independent study assignments, while still enrolled in a mixed ability classroom. Another area to address in mixed ability classrooms occurs when cooperative grouping takes place. Tomlinson and George (2004) note:

Grouping in middle grades will most likely achieve both equity and excellence for each learner when (a) heterogeneity is emphasized, (b) teachers are effectively supported in teaching high quality, meaning-making, expert-focused curriculum in heterogeneous settings, and (c) teachers are effectively supported in attending to learner variance in their classes. (p. 9)

Although challenges arise, Beecher and Sweeny (2008) discovered positive results toward closing the achievement gap in mixed ability classrooms through the implementation of enrichment to differentiate instruction. Their results indicate students’ positive attitudes about school
and increased student achievement on state tests. Another way to differentiate instruction is by incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Simply put, “universal design for learning provides a way for educators to view diversity in children as a strength instead of a problem” (Cramer, Nevin, Thousand, and Liston, 2006, p. 2). Likewise, Beninghof (2006) believes that all students can learn differently, and it is important for teachers to identify the learning style of each of their students. She provides the Engaging All Students (EAS) lesson plan model that provides teachers the opportunity to close the learning gap.

A final concern when placing mixed ability students in the same classroom revolves around assessment. The question becomes, if instruction is differentiated, should the assessment be differentiated as well? In a study by Moon, Brighton, and Callahan (2005) centering on authentic assessment, they found that differentiated assessments could be used to determine learning. Wormeli (2001) agrees that authentic assessment should be used as way to differentiate instruction. He suggests that authentic assessment can increase student participation to as much as 100%.
Summary

Schools are held accountable by taxpayers for spending on education, school administrations are being held accountable by the state for their test results, and teachers are being held accountable by their administrators for teaching the information on the tests. Students are being held accountable by their teachers to learn what they need to know. Add to the equation the fact that legislation over the past 30 years has brought about more and more inclusion in the classroom. The increased inclusion of students with disabilities has brought a high level of anxiety to classroom teachers and to parents of academically advanced learners. Teachers want to know how to best meet the needs of their students, and parents want to be secure in knowing the needs of their sons and daughters are being met. Research has shown that differentiated instruction can be used as a viable method to meet the needs of all students. Differentiated instruction can be used to encourage the low ability learner to succeed, as well as challenge the advanced learner to soar. To accomplish this, change must occur. One of the pioneers of differentiated instruction, Tomlinson et al. says, “we can dismiss neither the need to make classrooms a good fit for the full range of learners in them nor the immensity of the challenge in doing so” (2003, p. 134). Just as the
challenge to integrate classrooms was a daunting yet triumphant task, discovering ways for all students to succeed in mixed ability classrooms can be achieved if every stakeholder accepts the challenge.
Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Over the past several years, I had become keenly aware that some students were becoming increasingly bored with traditional classroom instruction. More specifically, I noticed students that I would have considered inquisitive thinkers or thoughtful team players exclude themselves from participating in classroom activities. Instead, I see them reading novels, drawing pictures, or gazing out the window with a distant look on their face. I interpret the look on their faces as saying, “Please stop all the nonsense and let me learn. Let me learn about what interests me.” The purpose of my study was to provide all of my students with opportunities to participate in enriching and challenging activities that address their specific interests so they can learn more than what is offered in the curriculum.

I started my journey into researching the effects of providing challenging and enriching learning opportunities as part of differentiated instruction in a heterogeneous eighth grade civics class, by considering the research methods that I would incorporate to collect my data. The methods that I used included: double entry journals that included eight weeks of observations and personal reflections, participant feedback
gathered by pre-study surveys and student interviews, collection and analysis of student work and blogs, and frequency of participation in the activities.

Setting

The setting for this study was a very old regional middle school located in rural western New Jersey. The original section of the two-story school building was constructed in 1927. Four additions have been made over the years. The most recent addition of six classrooms and installation of an elevator occurred three years ago. With just over 595 total students in grades six and seven, the school’s racial demographics are 87% White, 4% Latino, 4% Black, 3% Asian and less than 1% Native American. There are four separate sending K-6 elementary districts that feed students into the regional middle school. Each of the sending districts shares similar socioeconomic demographics by having nearly 20% of their students on free or reduced lunch. None of the sending elementary districts are part of the regional school district.

The location for this study was in an eighth-grade regular education civics classroom. All eighth grade students are assigned civics as a full year course as part of the district’s social studies requirement. The classroom has large windows across the entire back portion of the room, and white boards on the front and one of the side walls. Attached to
the front white board is a Smart Board. A long bulletin board adorns the other side wall. Also housed in the classroom is a computer cart with 30 laptop computers for student use. The room contains nine tables with separate chairs, which makes it a bit difficult for students to get up and walk around. Three of the tables face directly toward the front of the room and the remaining tables face the center of the room. Students can see the front of the room any location.

Participants

The participants for this study included 21 eighth grade students, 12 girls and 9 boys. The class meets three out of every four days for 55 minutes. Of the 21 students in the class, 19 are White, one Black, and one Hispanic. Each of the students attended this middle school in 7th grade and is familiar with one another. Two of the students have a 504 Action Plan in place for Attention Deficit Disorder. The class was chosen at random among three of the other civics classes that I teach.

Procedures

Before executing the study, I submitted a proposal to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) at Moravian College. The HSIRB provided me with the consent to proceed with my study. Upon gaining approval from the HSIRB, I sought consent from my school’s principal. She in turn forwarded my request to the Superintendent of
Schools. My request was approved during the next Board of Education meeting. Once final district approval was in place, I then sent a similar consent form home with my students. Every student returned the consent form with their parent’s signature, indicating their child had permission to be a participant in my study.

Survey

During the data collection phase of the study, all students were presented with the opportunity to complete five different enrichment activity opportunities. Each enrichment activity coincided with the unit of study that was being taught. To gauge any previous participation with challenging curriculum and to measure their thoughts about the possibility of completing enrichment activities, I surveyed each member of the class with a seven-question survey at the beginning of my study. The pre-study survey questions required the students to reflect back on their seventh grade experience and identify whether their learning needs were met by their teachers and to determine if their teachers addressed different student learning styles. Initially I intended to complete a post-study survey. However, the responses that I received from student blog pages provided answers to questions that I would have asked on a post survey.
Interviews

As the study progressed, I began to interview students about their thoughts on the various enrichment activities. All students were asked the same four questions during the interview process. The same questions were asked to ensure consistency throughout the interview process. In addition, regardless of when and where the interview was conducted, I attempted to make each student feel comfortable when providing his or her response. MacLean and Mohr (1999) suggest that interviewers listen intently to responses and provide a feeling of trust between the interviewer and interviewee. By demonstrating good listening skills and supportive body language, I was able to get students to respond honestly, even if they felt I would view their response as negative. To their credit, students became very candid about my enrichment activities.

In addition to surveys and interviews, daily observations of the students and my own written reflections became an integral part of my data collection. Likewise, student work helped to identify students who chose to participate and their level of interest. Finally, student blog entries allowed students to respond to the study-ending question. Surprisingly, the student blogs opened up dialogue that I never envisioned because the students could respond instantaneously to one another.
Throughout the eight weeks of my study, students were presented with five different enrichment opportunities to complete.

Field Log

I began the study by sharing my reasons for conducting this research with my class. I clearly stated that all of the enrichment assignments can be found on my school website and that students can email any questions to my school’s email address.

1. Activity #1 Immigration Web Quest

All students were introduced to Enrichment Activity #1 – Immigration Web Quest. The Web Quest included nine separate slides that permitted students to complete any one or all nine of them. If time permitted, students could work on them in class or complete them within the next week outside of class. During Back-to-School Night, parents were informed about my upcoming study. Likewise, they were afforded the opportunity to take copies of the first enrichment activity with them.

1. Activity #2 Brag About Your Proclamation

I introduced Enrichment Activity #2 – Brag About Your Proclamation Project Choice to the entire class. The class had just completed a culminating unit project where every student was required to create a formal proclamation to recognize someone
who displays superior citizenship skills. The enrichment activity included a two-tiered assignment that encouraged students to brag about the person they named for the proclamation.

2. Activity #3 Interview Someone Who Became a Naturalized Citizen.

The entire class was introduced Enrichment Activity #3 – The Interview. The activity contained two parts and required students to identify someone that gained U.S. citizenship by going through the naturalization process. Another component of the citizenship unit included the naturalization process. The students were asked to create and conduct an interview of a naturalized citizen, record responses, and provide a summary of the interview. The interview would have to be done outside of class. However, students were permitted the opportunity to tell the class about their interview and the insight that was gained.

3. Activity #4 Veterans’ Day

The entire class was introduced to Enrichment Activity #4 – Veterans’ Day. The tiered activity included four different levels of activities to complete. I explained that students could schedule a classroom visit by a U.S. Armed Forces veteran, create a poster
board about the armed forces, interview a veteran, or research about racial segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces.

4. Activity #5 – My Hometown Meetings

I introduced Enrichment Activity #5 – My Hometown Meetings to the full class. The class was given three options with the activity. They could visit a local government meeting and bring back a signed agenda, report on the meeting they attended, or return to a future meeting and report on any follow up agenda meeting topics.

**Surveys/Interviews**

- Students completed pre-study survey regarding prior experience with differentiated instruction and learning styles.
  
  *Rationale –* Discover if students felt they had been challenged in seventh grade and determine if they are interested in completing enrichment activities.

- Conducted individual interviews of each student.
  
  *Rationale –* Discover insight into motivation of students who did participate; seek student input to encourage participation; discover role of parental influence on participation; measure growth and knowledge gained.
**Student Work**

I collected all of the enrichment work that students completed. The submitted work included written answers to Web Quest responses, Power Point presentations, poster boards, and written responses to interview questions. A corresponding grade was given for their work completion.

**Student Blog Response**

Toward the end of my study, most students responded to three questions posted by me on a school-wide blog page. Students were made aware that I would first review their responses before they would be posted on the school blog and they were informed that their responses could be viewed across world-wide web. The blog topics sought student input and suggestions for enrichment activities they would want to see implemented in my civics class. In addition, students were asked to reflect on their classmates’ presentations about the enrichment activities. All students were encouraged to respond regardless of their level of participation in any of the enrichment assignments.
Trustworthiness

As I began my journey into researching the effects of differentiated instruction directed toward the advanced learners in a heterogeneous eighth grade civics class, I considered the research methods that I will incorporate to collect my data. The methods that I used included: double entry journals which included eight weeks of observations and personal reflections, participant feedback gathered by surveys (pre and post) and interviews, collection and analysis of student work, blogs, and frequency of participation. For those who might question the legitimacy of teacher research, Jenne (1994) points out that teachers are engaging in research when their collection of data on interactions and reflections on the experience reshape and refine their theories. The methods previously mentioned are supported by Jenne’s position about the legitimacy of teacher research.

Long before any of the methods could be implemented in my study, it was necessary to submit a proposal to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) seeking approval to conduct my study (Appendix A). The next step was to secure permission from the Board of Education (BOE) in my district (Appendix B). Upon receiving permission and well wishes from the Board (Appendix C), I then informed my
students about my study and the opportunity they had to participate in it. My students were then given a letter outlining my study and permission slip for their parents to sign, ensuring their participation in the study (Appendix D).

The data I collected was done in a consistent manner in order to assure trustworthiness. Field notes were recorded on a tablet as they occurred and then transferred to electronic copy as soon as it was possible. Questions asked during student interviews were consistent to assure credibility of the data. Mertler and Charles (2008) suggest that the reliability of qualitative research is established through consistency. If similar data are found by different but equally qualified researchers, the data are considered reliable.

The main focus for triangulation of my data was to employ the use of extended fieldwork, low inference descriptors, methods of triangulation, and participant feedback. The length of my study lasted eight weeks. Low inference descriptors assisted me in recording student’s quotes directly. I had three opportunities to collect student quotes. They included entries into my double entry field journal, teacher website blog entries, and student work. Both electronic and written responses of the student work were collected, thus ensuring accurate accounts of student quotes. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) recommend a minimum of three
sources of data to provide what they refer to as the concept of “crystallization” which will provide clarity on the perspective of the data and its analysis.

Crosschecking information and conclusions assisted in triangulating my findings. Most of the data I collected was anecdotal information gathered by observation. As I analyzed the data, I considered the data accurate after I corroborated it with data found in my double entry field journal, student work, and the responses I recorded from my teacher blog, student surveys, and interviews. Recording participant feedback on my findings provided the evidence I needed to verify my conclusions and insight. Hendricks (2009) points out that credibility is increased when researchers use multiple sources of data. This is why I believe the strategies just described promoted credibility in my findings.

Trying to understand all of the data and what to do with it was a monumental task. Fortunately, established research groups aided and directed me toward discovering meaning to all that I have collected. MacLean and Mohr (1999) advocate for the establishment of mutual support research groups because it is important to both the researcher and the research to be honest and supportive about problems and successes. Collegial support was a key component for my successful completion of the research.
As I collected my data it became necessary for me to organize it into categories and code the results. Further, it became necessary to create subtopics to analyze my findings even further. Identifying themes and patterns from the data enabled me complete data analysis. This inductive analysis enabled me to induce and create order of what I discovered, as suggested by Johnson (2008). Finally, reporting commonalities from interviews and surveys of my students allowed me to recognize biases and perspectives that I may not have previously identified or realized.

I ensured democratic validity by taking into account various points of view from all persons involved in my study. Outcome validity was assured as I continued implementing the research methods long after my findings were reported. I became committed to the processes I employed for this study. In addition, the process was appropriate, thus assuring process validity. I anticipated changes in my understanding of the initial research question. This lead me to changes in my teaching practices and insured catalytic validity. Hendricks (2009) comments that dialogic validity will lead me to explain the processes and outcomes to others such as colleagues and critical friends. That is exactly what happened when I shared my findings with my colleagues at a school-wide in-service presentation. As I shared the findings with my colleagues and my students, I discovered a renewed refinement of my processes.
I was open-minded as I conducted my research. Hendricks (2009) outlines the importance of clarifying initial biases at the outset of research by reflecting upon any preconceived ideas about the participants, setting, intervention, or the research process itself. As the researcher, I acknowledge that my biases included my love of learning new information and the excitement I feel when facing and conquering challenges. Having been raised by a father who never took time to relax, I always need something to keep me busy and engaged. Finally, I admit my biases toward the shortchanging and lack of challenging instruction for students at my school.
My Story

How Did I Get Here?

In the song, Once in a Lifetime, David Byrne asks, “Well, how did I get here?” I sometimes asked myself the same question. The lyrics throughout Byrne’s song imply that often times we go through life somewhat unconscious, as though we are on autopilot. After reflecting on my more than 20 years of teaching, I have to admit that there were times as a teacher when I felt I was, as Byrne suggests, on autopilot. It became too easy to do. I teach the same subject, the same curriculum, to the same adolescent faces six times each day. It can become very easy to switch on the autopilot and just endure the ride.

But that is not me. My DNA will not allow me to stand idly by and do nothing to improve my students’ educational experience. Every year during my Back to School Night speech, I pledge to parents that their child that my class will be the best learning experience they have ever had. When a parent of one of my eighth grade civics students asked me how I was going to meet the needs of his gifted son, I figured I better have a sound strategy and plan in place. Until I considered my research study, I am not so sure that I really had the answer to that question.
I cannot pledge my best effort to parents if I am just enduring the ride. I have to show that I enjoy the ride. Better yet, I have to get their children to enjoy the ride right along with me. For a mid baby-boomer raised by very hard working parents, I could never learn enough nor work too hard. While my grades did not always indicate it, I enjoyed every part of my educational experience, most notably junior high school. It was probably because I was always asking questions. I was that student that made everybody else grumble when they saw my hand go into the air. Come to think of it, things have not really changed that much for me. I still ask a lot of questions.

As a student, my favorite classes ended with me asking myself, “Is class over already?” That is the number one question I want my students to ask. As I reflect back on my experiences, I now know the answer to Byrne’s question. I got here because of the wonderful experiences I had as a young teen attending junior high school. I can never remember being bored during school. As a junior high school student I saw many new faces as all of the elementary schools funneled into one building. That same situation is very similar to the experience students in my class feel when they enter the much larger regional middle school. Students from four independent sending elementary districts funnel into one regional middle school in seventh grade.
As new students, we observed one another and adjusted our behavior, while becoming either leaders or followers. We established a level of trust and understanding between and among classmates. Most of all, as young teens, we started to make our mark in life. We began the first steps toward who we were going to become. The young people I see every day are taking the steps toward who they are going to become. They challenge authority, ask questions, and demand attention. I want to make sure that each and every one of my students has the opportunity to take steps in a positive direction. That is how I got here.

This Must be the Place

Before I could get students to take a step in any direction, I had to get to know them first. Likewise, they had to know me as well. I needed to gain a sense of who the leaders were and who the followers were. If I was going to ask them to work harder outside of the regular curriculum, I had to show them that I was willing to work a bit harder myself. Further, I could not just tell them to participate in the enrichment activities; I had to make it clear why it was important to participate.

I have every “get to know you” kind of handout ever created. If by chance there is one I do not have, it is likely the students have completed it in another class. So I needed something different. What better way for me to get to know my students and what better way for my students to know
me, than for them to explore my classroom? Because this is the place where we will get to know each other better, I want the students to feel comfortable while they are here. “The educator is responsible for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend themselves to social organization, an organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier of control” (Dewey, 1938, p. 54). As Dewey suggests, I attempted to gain a better understanding of the social chemistry in the class by instructing the students to get up out of their seats and spend the next five minutes exploring my classroom. I asked them to take mental notes of the posters, pictures, signs, books, and anything else they may notice in the room.

Jason: Are we allowed to talk?

Mr. Perruso: Whatever you feel is necessary to accomplish the task.

As the activity began, I could immediately tell who the leaders were. Brendan gravitated toward Robert, along with two other boys. Quickly a conversation began among the boys. It was apparent the conversation had nothing to do with the presidential poster they were
standing in front of. I noted to myself that this small group of boys might require re-focusing as classroom instructions begins.

Haley, who had been making eye contact with Karli since the start of class, quickly partnered up and began a conversation during their classroom exploration.

Aubrey, Bart, and Chelsea found one another and began walking slowly around the room, stopping momentarily at a poster with a big twenty-dollar bill on it. They then circled up and began looking out the window, whispering to one another just soft enough for no one else to hear.

Teresa: Were you a coach?

Mr. Perruso: Yes, freshman football, many years ago.

Teresa: Ew, you used to have a moustache?

Mr. Perruso: Well, I did until people started telling me I looked like Saddam Hussein. Then I shaved it off.

Teresa: I want to play football when I’m in high school.

Mr. Perruso: You know, there are girls playing football all across the country.

At first, students moved randomly to different locations around the room. Some students read the front pages of the old newspapers on the
wall. “Man Lands on the Moon” and “Nixon Resigns” are two of the many newspapers hanging on the wall.

Walking around by herself, Olivia asks, “Are these newspapers real?” “Absolutely!” I reply. I then proceeded to tell her the story of how I found them in the attic of an old house my family bought. She seemed interested in the story as I told it. Olivia told me about old things she has discovered in her house, such as her grandfather’s World War II medals.

Some students were noticeably alone while exploring the room. I had to remind Cody to get up out of his seat twice. He reluctantly got up and spoke to no one as he moved about the room. I noticed Kristen paying close attention to every item as she passed by. Like Cody, she was noticeably all by herself. Ashley came up to me as I stood near my desk. She stood right in front of me and gave me a short-handed wave as though she was worried that she might hit me if she waved any wider. Dean gave the appearance that he did not know what to make of the exploration. His look reminded me of when my mother would make me go grocery shopping with her when I was his age. I knew I had to do what she asked and not complain because at some point there was going to be a reward.

Perched above a tall bookcase in my room is a drab green metal drum that has the markings “Office of Civil Defense Survival Supplies – May be Used as Commode.” I rescued the Cold War era can from the
basement of our school when it was being cleaned out. Along with some cans of survival biscuits, the 1962 artifacts make for interesting conversation among the students.

After spotting the ugly green drum, Jason asked, “What is that for?” He asked his question loud enough to warrant everyone’s attention. Jason’s curious question was perfect timing because the five minutes of exploration time was up and I had gathered the clandestine intelligence that I was seeking. Once the students sat down, I answered Jason’s question by sharing with them the crazy experiences my classmates and I had while preparing for an atomic bomb attack back in the 1960s. They were astonished to learn that my classmates and I used to hide under our desks during duck and cover drills.

Mike: That would never work! You’d get burned up in seconds if an atomic bomb landed.

Mr. Perruso: Well, we believed it would keep us safe. And we just practiced what the teachers told us to do.

In just a short five minutes of classroom exploration, I was able to identify the students who were already friends and those who needed a friend, determine which students were inquisitive and which ones were disinterested, differentiate between the leaders and the followers, and
conclude which students were loners and which ones wanted to be left alone.

The students in the class began the exploration activity by traveling haphazardly around the room, moving in different directions, running to be with friends, and focusing on particular artifacts. However, by the end of the activity the entire class resembled a school of fish circling around at the same pace, with an equal amount of space between each person (Figure 1). There appeared to be no leaders and no followers, just one big school. I began to wonder who would break out from the school when I started my study.

Stop Making Sense

I was definitely excited to tell my students all about the research study that I was about to conduct and that they were going to be part of it. What sort of challenging enrichment activities could I plan for them? Would they be as excited as I am about the journey we were about to embark on? I teach four classes of eighth grade civics. Long before I was about to tell the students about our journey, I avoided the temptation to
EXPLORE THE CLASSROOM

WALK AROUND
DISCOVER, LOOK
MAKE IT AN ADVENTURE

I WANT TO GO WITH A FRIEND
ARE THERE ANY HERE?
OVER THERE, I SEE HER

I WALK ALONE
THERE ARE NO EXPECTATIONS
CONVERSATIONS ARE ONE WAY

ALONE OR IN A GROUP THEY’RE DISJOINTED
SHARING THE SAME SURROUNDINGS
SEEING THE SAME THINGS

STAND BACK AND OBSERVE
THEY START APART,
NOTICEABLE GAPS BETWEEN

HE’S INTERESTED, SHE’S NOT
SHE HAS NO FRIENDS, HE’S POPULAR
QUESTIONS, ALWAYS QUESTIONS

TIME’S ALMOST UP
MOVEMENT NOW BECOMES HARMONIOUS
THE GROUP FORMS AS ONE

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?
CONDUCT, CHEMISTRY, DETERMINATION
DISCIPLINE, INTUITIVENESS, INTEREST

Figure 1. Free verse poem about students exploring the classroom.
review my roster with their previous teachers. Too often teachers from a student’s previous year feel it is their duty to share their thoughts and shortcomings about their former students. I did not want to even entertain the notion that I had any students in my class who could not learn. “It is harder to convince young people they ‘can learn’ when they are cordoned off by a society that isn’t sure they really can. This is, I am afraid, one of the most destructive and long-lasting messages a nation possibly could give its children” (Kozol, 2005, p. 37). I believe that every student comes to school to learn and they do not need anyone, especially educators, suggesting otherwise. Therefore, I avoided any misgivings former teachers might have about my new students.

The possibility of voting in elections is a lifetime away in my students’ eyes. Jury duty and taxes are something their parents have to worry about. After all, they are just 13 and 14 years old. Eighth graders have enough to worry about such as keeping up with their Facebook page or managing busy activity and social schedules. It was my task to introduce, implement, and make sense of a study where I am asking students to challenge themselves to complete enrichment activities that are not even required as part of the social studies curriculum.
I began the introduction of my study by sharing my observations of what I have seen happening in my classroom over the past several years, along with what I have learned from conversations I have had with other middle school teachers. I told them that I have observed students reading thick novels, sketching intricate drawings, and carrying on heated conversations as I taught the class. I enlightened them about students that have taught their classmates and me about technology and information gathering websites. I described to them how classes used to be separated by academic ability. And that today all students, regardless of ability are in the same classroom. I explained my concern that some students may not be challenged by the curriculum and that I feel they hunger for more knowledge and participation.

They were a good audience as I spoke passionately to them about my research study and my reason for conducting it. When I told them I would be taking notes on their comments and the progress of the study, I informed them that I would not use their real names in my report. Chelsea shouted out, “That’s alright, you can use my real name if you want.”

As I finished my explanation of the study, I felt as though I spoke too fast for them to make sense of what I was trying to say. I knew that I needed to explain it again and make sure that they understood my plan. Unfortunately, the class period had come to an end. I was not sure if I told
them what their role was going to be in the study or if they understood that student participation was completely voluntary.

When I reflected back on my over-anxious and scattered explanation of my study to the class, I could not help but wonder about what I thought I said and what they probably heard. I created a cartoon (Figure 2) to illustrate what I believed the students heard. The cartoon illustrates the confusion that I believe the students must have felt.

New Feeling

I began the next class period determined to make sure my students understood what I was asking them to do. I once again informed them their participation was voluntary and they would not be penalized for non-participation. I reiterated the point that I would be providing opportunities for everyone to participate in enrichment activities that go above and beyond the regular curriculum. Some activities could be completed during class and others would need to be completed outside of class. I then asked if they had any questions about the study for me. Immediately, Teresa’s hand shot up.

“What happens if I get something wrong?” She asked. I assured her that students will get credit for what they do correctly and the points they earn will be figured into their marking period grade. I informed the class that some enrichment assignments may have various
Figure 2. I guess I did not make myself clear the first time.
parts to complete and students would be free to decide if they want to complete all or part of the assignment.

Feeling confident that the class now understood my plan and its purpose, I distributed an initial student survey aimed at gathering information about whether they felt they had been challenged by the curriculum last year and whether they would be interested in completing enrichment activities that go beyond the regular social studies curriculum (Table 1).

Of the 21 students who responded to the paper and pencil survey, not one student felt he or she was very challenged by the geography/social studies curriculum in seventh grade. Fifty two percent of the students felt their academic needs were sometimes met. Likewise, 81% of the students felt their teachers sometimes or never modified their teaching methods to address student-learning styles. As I read over the responses, I began to reflect on the words of Freire. “His task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration-contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that endangered them and could give significance (Freire, 2000, p. 71). As Friere suggests, the role of the educator is not to push away students’ interest in learning with unimportant facts and minutia. I felt students were being pushed away
Table 1

*Pre Study Student Survey*

1. Did you feel challenged by the curriculum (subject matter) taught to you in seventh grade?
   - very challenged
   - somewhat challenged
   - challenged
   - not challenged

2. Did you feel your teachers met all of your academic (learning) needs?
   - always
   - most times
   - some times
   - never

3. Did your teachers modify (change) their teaching methods to address your learning style?
   - always
   - most times
   - some times
   - never

4. Did your teachers modify (change) their assignments to address your learning style?
   - always
   - most times
   - some times
   - never

5. Do you regularly finish quickly and correctly and consistently score high on tests?
   - always
   - most times
   - some times
   - never

6. Are you unmotivated to complete daily repetitive classwork?
   - always
   - most times
   - some times
   - never

7. Would you have interest in completing alternative assignments outside of the classroom that are more challenging and demanding?
   - Very interested
   - somewhat interested
   - a little interested
   - no interest at all
from learning after reading their responses to the opening questions on my survey.

While student survey responses indicated their seventh grade teachers did not modify their teaching methods or assignments to meet students’ needs, I was curious to know what level of interest the students would have in completing enrichment assignments. I wanted to know if when they were presented with challenging opportunities to complete demanding and rigorous work, would they be interested in doing it. Only two students out of 21 indicated they had no interest at all in participating in more challenging or demanding work. As I read the results, I figured I would have students climbing over one another to participate.

**Paper**

The very first opportunity to complete an enrichment activity was entitled, *Immigration Web Quest* (Appendix E). The activity consisted of nine tiered assignments. Assignments varied from reading articles to reviewing the requirements to become a U.S. citizen to watching videos about new American citizens. I had just started a unit on immigration and felt this activity would fit nicely into the topics we were exploring in class.

It took about five minutes to explain the assignment to the entire class. Following my explanation of the assignment, I informed the
students that I would leave copies of the assignment paper on the front table for anyone who might be interested in completing all or part of the activity. I also made them aware that a copy of the activity could be downloaded from my school’s website. Students were given one week from the day it was assigned to complete the activity if they wanted to receive credit.

I finished my portion of the lesson for the day, and students began working on their regular classroom assignments. As students finished, some of them came to the front table to take the enrichment activity. Other students chose to visit Student Success Stations located throughout my room where they can choose a book to read or puzzle to complete. Of the nine who took the enrichment activity, six began working on it right away.

Jason scanned over the assignment and moved directly to the interview segment on the activity. He asked for a set of headphones so he could listen without disturbing his classmates. Brendan was sitting near him and had a puzzled look on his face. He asked if could listen to music, too. I pointed out that Jason was not listening to music; he was watching a video about immigration and he was welcome to do the same. Brendan indicated he was not interested. Sitting on the other side of Brendan was Robert. With a computer in front of him, he was working on the activity.
One week after I introduced the first enrichment activity and one week after nine students took copies of the assignment paper with them, only two students turned in any part of the activity. Teresa completed all nine assignments and turned it in two days early. Haley, completed two of the assignments. I had no idea she was even interested in doing it. I was disappointed to say the least that so few students chose to complete the activities. I know I saw six students working on the activity during class. What had they done with their work and why was it not submitted? I found out at the end of my study that Robert thought all nine activities had to be done in order to receive credit. He had in fact completed six of the activities and never submitted them to me. Consequently, he received no credit for the work he did. Jason listened to the interviews of new Americans, but went no further. I felt I had to do a better job of promoting the next activity.

While I was disappointed because few assignments were turned in for credit, I questioned if students had challenged themselves to do something that was not required. I wondered if they had learned anything new or did I just waste the paper that the assignments were printed on? The answer was that they did challenge themselves, because Jason shared the information about the interview he watched and Olivia told the class
about the Dream Act legislation she read. To my delight, the paper was NOT wasted.  

**Perfect World**

The class had just completed a unit on citizenship. As if teenagers did not know already, they discovered they have rights as U.S. citizens. They learned about the differences between natural-born citizens and naturalized citizens. Additionally, I emphasized that along with rights comes civic duties and responsibilities. As a class, they read about active citizenship and discussed several examples of ordinary citizens demonstrating noteworthy citizenship. As a culminating assignment for the citizenship unit, all students were instructed to create a proclamation for someone or some people whom they felt demonstrated significant citizenship skills. All of the students in the class completed the required proclamation assignment.

The next enrichment activity expanded on their proclamation assignment. Unlike the first enrichment activity, most of this activity would have to be completed outside of class. The second enrichment activity was entitled *Brag About Your Proclamation Choice* (Appendix F). The activity was tiered into two segments. Students could complete one or both of the activities.
I explained the activity to the entire class and emphasized that anyone may participate. I again posted the activity on my school website page and provided printed copies of the activity for students to take on the front table. No students took copies of the assignment on the day I introduced it.

Trying to capitalize on the citizenship process portion of the unit, I also introduced the third enrichment activity that required students to conduct an interview of anyone that has gone through the process to become a naturalized citizen. The name of the third enrichment activity was *The Interview* (Appendix G). No one took copies of this activity either. Now I was really disappointed because I knew of three students in the class whose parents were naturalized citizens. Surely they would jump at the chance to interview their parents and gain some valuable class credit, not to mention an opportunity to gain some priceless knowledge about their parents.

What I learned on that day was that I threw too much at one time toward the students. I felt that I overwhelmed them with too many enrichment assignments. When class resumed the next day, I re-introduced the *Brag About Your Proclamation* activity only. I presented them with choices of ways to brag. I told them they could create a Power Point or poster or whatever way they felt best displays to the class their
feelings about their proclamation selection. Four students were quickly interested and took the activity paper with them.

*Brendan:* Can we work on it in class? I want to name my coaches from football.

*Mr. Perruso:* Of course you can, as long as it doesn’t interfere with any required assignments from class.

Toward the end of the class period, Olivia started a conversation with me about her grandfather who was awarded several medals while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II.

*Olivia:* I want to brag about my grandfather.

*Mr. Perruso:* Is he still living?

*Olivia:* No, he drowned in the Delaware River by accident. My dad has newspaper articles about when it happened. His name was in the headline.

*Mr. Perruso:* Oh, I’m so sorry for your loss. Did you ever meet him?

*Olivia:* No, but my dad showed me the purple medal that my grandfather had. And I remember hearing about his stories.

I had to write a late pass for her to take to her next class because she had so much she wanted to tell me about her grandfather that she went
on beyond the late bell. It was obvious to me how proud of him she was. Olivia never did complete either part of the activity. However, I thought to myself, how many opportunities does she get to share her sense of pride about her grandfather?

A few days after my re-introduction of the bragging activity, Kristen and Teresa came to me and asked when they could present their project to the class. They both created Power Point presentations to brag about their selections. I scheduled both of them for the end of the week.

Kristen was smiling and I could see she was very proud of her project. She selected a young girl who was featured on the television show, *Extreme Homemakeover*. The young girl from the show has a rare blood disease and Kristen said she chose it because, “Her story really touched me.”

Kristen’s Power Point presentation included eight slides with information that taught the class about the struggles the young girl endures and raised awareness about blood disorders (Figure 3). She seemed very knowledgeable about the disorder and answered every question students asked her. A regular volunteer at summer camps for children, Kristen not only created a Power Point presentation, but also gained valuable insight during her research. Kristen informed me that she would like to contact the young girl to find out what she could do to get involved.
Who is Lizzie Bell?

Lizzie Bell is a sixteen year old who has a rare blood disorder called Diamond Blackfan Anemia or DBA. This means that her body fails to make red blood cells. Without the amount of red blood cells she needs to survive and fight off infections Lizzie’s life is in constant danger. To help her survive she has to get a blood transfusion twice a month. One day while she was in the hospital she noticed that the cooler that held all the blood donations was quite empty. She knew that she had to do something. She and her family started the John P. Bell foundation, named after her grandfather. The foundation supports many causes like blood, organ, and marrow drives, DBA awareness, Mediwagons for children’s hospitals and many more. For her efforts in DBA and blood donation awareness Lizzie has been featured in magazines like SEVENTEEN.

What is DBA?

- DBA stands for Diamond Blackfan Anemia. It is a rare blood disease that is characterized by a shortage of red blood cells. Some people with DBA have malformed thumbs, cleft lip or palate, receding chin, kidney and or heart abnormalities, and may be short in stature. Although, some people have none of these clinical signs of the disease just anemia. About seven in one million people will be diagnosed. DBA can be diagnosed throughout a person’s life, but it is usually diagnosed before the age of one.

- Fact: Lizzie is one in about seven hundred people who have DBA.

Figure 3. Kristen’s Power Point Presentation about Lizzie Bell.
I found out about Lizzie on ABC’s Extreme Makeover Home Edition. Her house was not safe for her to live in it had a huge crack through the foundation. They had to remove their bathtub and a snake had come up through the hole where it used to be. Lizzie’s family was chosen for the show and Ty and his crew were able to build them a wonderful new home.

**Lizzie’s Projects**

- Lizzie wants to make sure that there is always enough blood donations to keep people like herself alive. She also wants to comfort kids who are receiving transfusions and other procedures because she knows what they are going through.

> Lizzie is a big supporter in blood and bone marrow donations. Tons of children depend on blood because of burns, injuries, surgeries and more. Did you know that every two seconds someone somewhere is in need of blood or blood products.

Figure 3 (cont’d.). Kristen’s Power Point Presentation about Lizzie Bell.
Teresa introduced the second Power Point presentation. She chose Oprah Winfrey as her proclamation recipient. Like Kristen, Teresa presented a slide show full of informative information and pictures to illustrate her points of interest (Figure 4). She confidently told the class about Oprah’s accomplishments, most notably the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy. During Teresa’s presentation, she noted that the academy was in South Africa and the mission of the Academy is to teach young Black girls that they could become leaders one day. Teresa mentioned that in the past, education was very restricted for Blacks in South Africa by apartheid. I asked the class if they knew what apartheid was.

Robert: That was with Nelson Mandella.

Mr. Perruso: Who is Nelson Mandella?

Robert: He was like Ghandi and Martin Luther King. He didn’t use violence to change the way things were.

He was thrown in jail and then he became the leader of South Africa.

After Kristen and Teresa finished their presentations, I again was somewhat disappointed by the fact that only two students completed the activity. But then I realized that Kristen taught the class about a brave young girl who struggles with a rare blood disease and not one student
Figure 4. Teresa’s Power Point presentation about Oprah Winfrey.
was reading a book or staring out the window when she did it. Teresa taught the class more than they ever knew about the accomplishments of Oprah Winfrey. Likewise, students listened and learned as she addressed the class and answered their questions.

For Kristen and Teresa it was a perfect world as their inquiry and investigation led them to discover real world themes. Freire suggests, “Every thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is thus really educational, while all education investigates thinking” (Freire, 2000, p. 109). Each one of the student’s presentations promoted authentic education.

**Happy Day**

Only one student chose to participate in the third enrichment activity. The activity asked students to interview someone who went through the naturalization process to become a U.S. citizen. Just a few months before I presented the activity, Teresa’s mother became “part of the American family,” as she stated in the introduction to her interview. This activity was more private than the previous two. However, it was the most poignant. It was poignant because when Teresa wrote down the results of her interview and shared them with me, I became the medium for a young girl to share her deep pride and respect for the journey her mother has endured. Vygotsky proposes, “Learning and development
coincide at all points in the same way that two identical geometrical figures coincide when superimposed” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 81). While learning about her mother’s journey, Teresa developed into a proud young girl with a deeper connection to her mother. Teresa shared with me how she helped her mother prepare for the citizenship test because many of the topics on the citizenship test were also being taught in my civics class.

In her introduction to the interview, Teresa wrote that she and her mother came to the United States from the Ukraine eight years ago. She described her mother as “affable and cordial.” I’m pretty sure those were vocabulary terms she was learning in Language Arts class at the time. The questions asked in the interview focused mainly on the naturalization process (Figure 5). The last question, probably the most telling, Teresa asked her mother, “What did you do when you found out you passed the test?” Her mother responded, “I had an amazing feeling and I just put a smile on my face.”

In her closing words, Teresa reflected on the interview she conducted. She described how her mother studied for the naturalization test everywhere she could and at every opportunity available. Her mother listened to an informational CD when driving the car and memorized everything she could from a booklet. Listening to Teresa and reading her
The Interview

My mom has been through the naturalization process. Her name is Oksana Taletskay. She was born on March 10th 1978 in Ukraine. My mom came to the U.S. with me when I was five. Seven years ago we settled into an apartment not knowing that June 20th we would be considered part of the American family or in other words citizens. To me America is like one large home. I feel safe and protected in this country. To me American's are like one big family. My mom and I have been living in the same state and same town, Hackettstown New Jersey, for 7 years now. My mom is a very affable and cordial person. She worked diligently to get the citizenship. I believe what she earned she deserved.

The Interview
Teresa: Was it hard to get through the naturalization process?
Roseanna: No it was not. The application was interesting to fill out because I didn't know what my next step would be.
Teresa: Were you nervous when you got asked question? If so, why?
Roseanna: A little bit. I was nervous because I was afraid I would get something wrong.
Teresa: Has becoming a citizen changed your life?
Roseanna: So far no.
Teresa: Are you proud of yourself?
Roseanna: Yes I am.
Teresa: Was studying for the citizenship test hard?
Roseanna: No I just needed to focus when I studied.
Teresa: How Did you feel when you knew you passed?
Roseanna: I felt like I accomplished something important. I felt important.
Teresa: Do you think you have opportunities? If so for what?
Roseanna: Yes I feel that becoming a citizen well help me to get a better job.
Teresa: Was it easy to give you allegiance to the U.S.?
Roseanna: Yes it was once I knew that I had reached my goal of becoming a citizen giving up my allegiance was the most important thing I had to do.
Teresa: What did you do when you found out you passed?
Roseanna: I had an amazing feeling and I just put a smile on my face.

My mom worked really hard to pass for the citizenship test. Some of the answers of the interview shocked me. Once she said she was a little bit nervous that stunned me because I knew she had studied really hard when driving somewhere she listened to the CD and every night with the booklet open memorizing everything she can. Therefore I thought she should have had more confidence. I agreed with a lot of the answers. The answers my mom gave me to the questions were well said. I believed every response she gave me. Further more I believe the more assiduous my mom was the better she had a chance of passing and then wouldn't be as stressed.

Figure 5. Teresa’s interview with her mother.
interview helped me to understand why she is so driven and determined to always do well in class. It became clear to me that June 20th, 2011 was quite a happy day for Teresa and her mother. It was the day they both became part of a much bigger family.

**Life During Wartime**

Veterans’ Day was approaching and I read about an initiative sponsored by the History Channel entitled, *Take a Veteran To School Day* (Appendix H). Being the son of a World War II veteran, I thought this was an excellent way for students to gain first hand knowledge about our military veterans. I already knew from talking to some of my students that they had military veterans in their family. I felt this activity would present a perfect opportunity for students to display their pride for a family member who has served his or her country.

The initiative from the History Channel provided several options for students to participate. They included students planning a visit by a military veteran to our classroom, conducting an oral history with a veteran, creating an informational poster board about any branch of the military, or researching racial desegregation in the military. Each one of the activities provided a different level of difficulty for interested students.

As soon as I introduced the activity to the class, hands went into the air as students wanted to ask questions.
Aubrey: I don’t know any vets.

Mr. Perruso: You don’t have to. There are opportunities for everyone to participate.

Karli: Can I bring in someone who is going to join the Army?

Mr. Perruso: No, I’m sorry. They must be someone who has already served.

Olivia: Can I bring in someone who is really old, like 55?

I just realized Olivia considered me really old. Since I was only one year away from that milestone, the question really hurt my feelings. I think.

Mr. Perruso: Absolutely, I’ll help him with his walker.

Olivia: Can I bring in more than one?

Mr. Perruso: Sure. The more, the merrier?

Before class ended, six students had taken papers outlining the enrichment assignment. No more questions were asked. As Veterans’ Day approached, I began feeling concerned that no one had approached me about scheduling a veteran’s visit. I reminded them that time was running out and administrative approval for a visitor could take a few days.

By coincidence, I happened to be in the main office on the same day I was reminding the class about the activities and ran into a former
student now serving in the U.S. Army. He was awaiting deployment to Afghanistan in the upcoming weeks. When he was an eighth grade student, I remembered him struggling as he tried to find his purpose in life. Now standing before me in his army fatigues was a grown young man who knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life. I asked if he would come to my class and speak to them about his life’s journey. He most graciously agreed to come by in a few days and address my class.

On the following Friday he kept his word. After arriving to school 15 minutes early, he read the morning announcements and led the school in the Pledge of Allegiance. He walked into my room with a level of confidence I had never seen before from him. With moisture building up in my eyes and goose bumps covering my arms, I introduced the young soldier to the class and encouraged him to tell the class his story. Some of the girls could not stop staring at this handsome young man standing in the front of their class. Later, they secretly asked me for his cell number. No way was I going to divulge such top secret information. It was a wonderful visit and the students were full of questions. The soldier obliged and answered every question they asked. He finished by stressing the importance of doing well in school and respecting the teachers. I greatly appreciated the advice he gave.
Suddenly more interest emerged after the young soldier’s visit. Olivia and Kristen created posterboards that outlined the U.S. Army and the U.S. Air Force. Both students shared their creations with the class. Teresa created a poster about the U.S. Army and also shared her discoveries with the class. Initially, I was somewhat disappointed by the lack of participation in the activities. That was until a few weeks later when I asked students to write Christmas cards to the troops. Not only did nearly every student write out a card, some wrote several cards. Haley, the giggly adolescent girl who asked for the young soldier’s phone number, completed three Christmas cards. Most touching of all was when Kristen asked specifically for the young soldier’s overseas address so her entire Girl Scout Troop could write to him. I discovered it is not necessary for students to complete an orchestrated set of instructions to reach a higher level of learning or gain an appreciation for personal sacrifice.

Don’t Worry About the Government

The final enrichment activity I presented asked students to attend local government meetings (Appendix I). Suggestions I provided to students included attending local borough or township committee meetings, witnessing Board of Education meetings, and observing County
Freeholder meetings. As with the previous enrichment activities, the assignments were tiered and provided for different levels of difficulty.

Mike: Those meetings are so boring. They’re a health risk for boredom!

Some students could be seen nodding their heads in agreement with Mike. When I created this activity, I thought it was the best one because I have attended so many of these types of meetings over the years. I’ve always considered local government meetings to be the nerve center of local decision-making. I even tried to entice the class by telling them that refreshments are served at their Board of Education meetings. Six students did take the information about the activity as they left the class. The next day, Ashley asked if her participation as a student member of the district’s Middle States Committee would count.

“Are you kidding me? That would be fantastic,” I told her.

She told me that her parents recommended her for the school’s committee and that she already attended one meeting. Ashley confided in me that she felt intimidated by the high school members of the committee. I assured her that they are not so bad and the situation will improve as time goes on. After the second meeting Ashley told me how she spoke up with suggestions and members of the committee listened intently. A faculty member of the Middle States committee confirmed Ashley’s
participation to me and commented that it was wonderful to have student representation on it.

A student member of a school district committee was not something I had ever anticipated when I introduced the activity. However, I believe her participation was validated as she became more comfortable with her fellow committee members. Ashley enthusiastically shared her committee experience with the class. She presented her experiences with a viewpoint I could never have explained.

**New Feeling**

Throughout my study, I created what I thought were intuitive activities. I developed enrichment activities that I believed many students would be interested in completing. The activities were tiered to allow for as many academic levels as possible. Most activities paralleled the regular civics curriculum. Yet, only a few students participated and completed the activities. I began to develop a hunch that students were viewing the enrichment activities as unnecessary and extra. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that researcher hunches are an avenue for building rapport with the subjects of your study. As a way to build a rapport and find out what suggestions my students would have to increase more participation in the enrichment activities, I posted an on-line blog on my school’s website. After signing into the website, students could respond to the blog
questions any time they wanted. The blog provided me with an
opportunity to read and respond to their posts. Additionally, the blog
provided the opportunity for students to read their classmates postings. It
enabled me to build a rapport with my students. Most importantly, the
blog helped me to understand why students chose not to complete the
activities (Figure 6).
Figure 6. Quotes from students about why they did not want to complete activities.
Data Analysis

Introduction

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (p.147). The purpose of my data analysis was to reduce the vast amounts of textual information I gathered into smaller categories and emerging themes, thereby making it easier to understand my findings. The textual information I created during my study took the form of field notes, margin comments, and transcripts.

Analysis During Data Collection

Analyzing data while still collecting it is ongoing and necessary, as Hendricks (2009) points out. The ongoing data analysis and daily reflections enabled me to make necessary strategy changes as they became necessary.

Field Log Analysis

The most difficult tool to maintain during classroom instruction was my field log because I tried to record everything I saw and heard. It was filled with quickly scribbled notes about student observations and my initial thoughts about those observations. The format I used to record the data is best described as a double entry journal. But as Johnson (2008)
points out, eventually patterns will begin to emerge from the numerous pieces of data. The patterns did in fact begin to emerge when I transcribed my hastily scribbled notes onto a more readable word-processed document. Mills (2007) suggests the best way to gather data in the field is to gather less and be content with furthering your understanding of the experience. My analysis of the field log data included participant observations, personal reflection, interviews, student work, and student blog entries.

**Participant observations.** Most of the enrichment activities that were offered to the students were completed outside of the classroom. However, student presentations of their completed work did account for over half of the participant observations during my study. Participant observations were conducted both on students who chose to complete enrichment activities and students who did not. As the teacher, I became an active participant observer as students presented their enrichment activity findings to the class by furthering my understanding as I asked questions and made comments.

**Student work.** I collected all work done by students who chose to complete the enrichment activities. The work consisted of Web Quest handouts, Power Point presentations, interviews, and posters. Collection of students’ artifacts provided me the opportunity to reflect on the quality
of work they did and the level of participation. Most importantly, my collection of their work helped me to understand each student’s connection to why they completed the assignments that they did.

**Interview analysis.** Toward the end of my study, I conducted a formal interview with each student in the class individually in order to gain an understanding of their thoughts about the enrichment activities. Every student was asked the same series of open-ended questions as I recorded their responses. Although open-ended questions yield more specific and meaningful data, Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2005) suggest that open-ended questions allow students to answer in their own words. I made every effort to avoid leading students toward any response. Likewise I did show interest in every response and did not force my opinion to any student response.

**Bins and themes.** Once all of the data collection was completed, it became necessary for me to organize the data into categories to better understand what I recorded. At first it seemed like I had a complex amount of words, comments, and phrases. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) point out, obvious topics, phrases, patterns, and behaviors will begin to stand out among the myriad of data. The pieces began to fit together as I began to organize my data into bins and themes. I created a graphic organizer (Figure 7) to visually emphasize they way I envision the
Figure 7. Themes graphic organizer.
continuity of all my codes and theme statements. Similarly, I created a list of theme statements that emerged from my data (Figure 8).
THEME STATEMENTS

What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of eighth grade civics students when enrichment activities are implemented as part of differentiated instruction?

Enrichment Activities
Developing tiered activities provide students the opportunity to choose topics that they feel are relevant or appropriate to them.

Student Presentations
Students gain knowledge and self-confidence through their detailed presentations, and learn from each other as they respond to questions.

Communication
Varied means of communication with the teacher offer a sense of direction and satisfaction for students.

Encouragement
Motivation and persistence are key for encouraging student engagement.

Figure 8. Theme Statements
Findings

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to provide challenging enrichment opportunities for all students in my civics class that went beyond the scope of the general civics curriculum. Most eighth grade students are unaware of the academic and social opportunities that await them when they enter high school. Likewise, many are unaware of the challenges and focus that is required to become successful when taking higher-level courses, such as Honors or Advanced Placement.

The students I teach come from four separate sending elementary school districts where several different levels of expectations and standards are in place. Not only were variations discovered between the sending districts, but expectations also differed within the middle school itself.

Some students have enjoyed academic success to this point with little effort, while others have had many roadblocks to maneuver around. Not one of my students felt that he or she was very challenged by the curriculum in seventh grade social studies (Table 2). Likewise, most felt that their seventh grade teachers did not meet their academic needs. In spite of their past experiences during seventh grade, nearly every student was interested in completing enrichment assignments outside of the
Table 2

*Initial Student Survey Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Challenged</th>
<th>Somewhat Challenged</th>
<th>Challenged</th>
<th>Not Challenged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel challenged by the curriculum taught to you in seventh grade?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Most Times</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel your teachers met all of your academic needs?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Interested</th>
<th>Somewhat Interested</th>
<th>A Little Interested</th>
<th>No Interest At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you have interest in completing assignments outside of the classroom that are more challenging and demanding?</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
classroom. Manning, Stanford, and Reeves (2010) cautions about students succumbing to what they refer to as the imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome occurs when students who have typically enjoyed high grades with little effort start to question whether they are really as smart as what they have been told when more effort is required of them.

I did not want to stifle their passion for learning or place roadblocks in the way of their intuitiveness. I wanted to provide opportunities for my students to enrich their learning experience voluntarily. I wanted to provide tiered activities that would stimulate their quest for higher-level learning in areas that they felt were relevant or interesting. It became necessary for me to vary my means of communication when explaining the enrichment activities so as to provide better direction to the students. Persistence and motivation never hurt when trying to encourage new ideas to students. Selling the idea of what was viewed by many students as extra work became a challenge. The most unexpected outcome of my study came from the student presentations. I, along with my students, discovered the underlying passions and interests of a few students.
Enrichment Activities

Developing tiered activities provide the opportunity to choose topics that students feel relevant or appropriate to them. When creating the enrichment activities for my study, I reviewed the literature that addressed the learning needs of advanced learners in regular education classrooms. I also sought ideas from the community of gifted and talented learners.

Initially the enrichment activities paralleled the civics curriculum. By staying close to the curriculum, I thought students would have a better understanding of the outcome of the activity. I believed that newly learned vocabulary and concepts would make it easier to recognize information as the students gathered it during an enrichment activity. That happened for students who researched the Dream Act, legislation that would provide citizenship to young immigrants who were brought here illegally by their parents. When they completed an ICivics Web Quest enrichment activity, they shared with me that they understood the concept of the legislation. Further, the video from the Web Quest put faces to the issue.

Since the ability level varies so much in my classroom, it was necessary for me to tier each of the assignments. That way all students
had the opportunity to participate. Some students chose to complete activities at the knowledge and comprehension level, such as completing the “push-pull” effect of immigration, while others chose to analyze and synthesize their findings by creating Power Point presentations.

When creating each enrichment activity, I asked myself, if I were an eighth grade civics student, what would this have to do with me? I wanted students to make a connection to what I was asking them to do. On a few occasions, the relevance and importance of the topic shined through. If the enrichment activity was something a student could connect to, there was no stopping them from learning more about it.

When I asked students to bring a veteran to school for Veterans’ Day, I never expected the topic to gather as much passion as it did for Olivia. Although her grandfather died long before she was born, she is still researching his life and his family’s history. Similarly, I thought Christmas cards to the troops would end after I mailed them. That was not good enough for Kristen who, along with her Girl Scout troop, sent even more cards to the troops. Dewey states, “Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time” (Dewey, 1938, p. 48). Olivia continues to learn about her family’s ancestry.
Strict guidelines normally associated with classroom assignments had to be lifted when suggesting enrichment activities. I learned to become flexible when students attempted the activities. As many students shared their busy schedules with me, I discovered that young people are involved in many activities both in and out of school. Due dates needed to be adjusted and choices needed to be made about what I would accept. I learned to appreciate any effort students made toward the completion of an enrichment activity. Additionally, I learned to accept suggestions from students about the activities. While Ashley did not have interest in going to a local school board meeting, she was a student member of the district’s Middle States evaluation team and willingly shared her experience as a member of the committee with the class.

**Communication**

Varied means of communication with the teacher offer a sense of direction and satisfaction for students. Students are full of questions, and teachers must discover a variety of ways to answer them. For today’s student who is used to instant messaging with friends, and also expects instant response from teachers, technology played a vital role in opening communication between my students and me.

On a few occasions, students’ printers did not work at home, or they had questions about some portion of the enrichment activity. On the
occasion when they had a question, they thought nothing of sending me an email anytime of the day or night to get an answer. I quickly discovered that I was checking my email much more regularly and responding when I could. That would not stop them from asking me first thing in the morning if I got their email, even if they sent it at 11PM. I would often tell them I would check it as soon as I can. They would accept my response only to ask me again the very next time they see me.

Validating the fact that a student stayed up late to do an enrichment assignment that was voluntary in the first place is something any good teacher must encourage. Vygotsky declares that, “Just as operating with the meaning of things leads to abstract thought, we find that the development of will, the ability to make conscious choices, occurs when the child operates with the meaning of actions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 101). One component of differentiated instruction is the opportunity afforded to all students to make conscious choices about participating in the enrichment activities or not. The students who participated in the enrichment activities discovered more understanding and awareness toward their decision-making abilities as a result of their actions. That is why it was important for me to respond to student emails as soon as I could.
As students began to work on the enrichment activities, I learned that I would have to provide opportunities other than during class time to meet their needs. Sometimes students would see me in the hallway in between classes and want to discuss what they were doing. On most days, I was available before and after school for students to stop by with their questions. On one rare occasion, I worked through my lunch period to help a student find a poster board that she needed for her project.

Since our school website is equipped with a blog page, I was able to create a blog where students could ask and answer questions, post their thoughts, and respond to classmates’ postings. While each student response on the blog had to be reviewed by me first, it was instrumental in creating a dialogue between students about various topics. When I asked students for their suggestions about what enrichment activities they would like to see, I was surprised to see the excitement in their postings and amazed that overall 54 student responses were recorded (Figure 10).
Perruso Civics Blog Page

WHAT WOULD YOUR SUGGESTION BE FOR THE NEXT CIVICS ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY?

Olivia
- My suggestion wuld b something interesting like have trials where we cn act as judges and prosecutors have the trials be based on stuff tht is happening around us based off of civics like new laws etc... we cn act it out and whoever does it will get a certain amnt of points.

Olivia
- I CALL PROSECUTOR!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! <3

Kristen
- I CALL DEFENSE

Kristen
- OR JURY

David
- I like that idea. I am the judge !!!!!!

Olivia
- fine deal

David
- My suggestion for another enrichment activity would be to learn several amendments to the constitution and create a poster showing the amendments that you researched. Include details about the amendments and why they were added.

Ashley
- I CALL BEING THE DEFENSE LAWYER!!!!! TRAILS SOUND AMAZING!! PLEASE!? Can we? I want to!! I say we should do a case on recent cases. . . ex Casey Anthony etc. CAN WE PLEASE?

Brendan
- UR CRAZY CASY ANAATHONY IS A WASK JOB DONT RIGHT ABOUT HER

Olivia
- Tru that brendan

Jason
- I like the projects already out there but my idea is, get a poster board, and choose one of the plans, either 3/5, Virginia, New Jersey, Great compromise, or electoral college and give information on which ever plan you want, who proposed it who like it who didn’t like it, and what the plan would look like

Kristen
- Maybe we should hold a mock Constitutional Convention

Figure 10. Perruso Blog Page.
Encouragement

Motivation and persistence are key for encouraging student engagement. I thought that if I was highly motivated and eager to discover new challenging material, students would be, too. That was not quite how it happened. While it is important for me to be enthusiastic about the activities, I soon realized that I already did the assignments when I planned them. They apply to my world and are connected to my life, not the students.

What I had to do was encourage the students to make their own connections to the activities. I made the information and instructions readily available. As I introduced each activity, I provided written instructions and rubrics for students to follow. I also provided downloadable versions of the assignments on my school website for students and their parents to access whenever they needed.

Persistence paid off after I kept reminding the students about Veterans’ Day and the opportunity to schedule a veteran to visit the class. While there was no doubt my enthusiasm shined through for the activity, I was disappointed that no student scheduled a veteran for a visit. So I did the next best thing. I scheduled a current member of the U.S. Army to visit the class. He was a former student waiting for orders to go to Afghanistan.
It was his enthusiasm that enabled students to make their connections. Soon after his visit, the students made posters about the armed forces and wrote Christmas cards to troops overseas. After talking with the students, I discovered that they saw themselves in the young soldier who stood in the front of them. Freire states that, “Every thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is thus really educational, while all authentic education investigates thinking. The more educators and the people investigate the people’s thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate” (Freire, 2011, p. 109). Listening to a young man who could be the older brother to any one of my students pour his heart out about his life’s journey is as authentic as a lesson can get. I discovered that sometimes the motivation and encouragement might have to come from someone other than me.

**Student Presentations**

Students gained knowledge and self-confidence through their detailed presentations, and learned from each other as they responded to questions. Some of the activities that students completed required them to tell the class about what they discovered. Their presentations included Power Point slides, story telling, and simply reporting to the class.

As students prepared and ultimately presented their findings, it became obvious that they wanted to be creative and informative. They
provided details that they felt were important, while gaining new insight to
a topic that interested them. As Kristen told the class about a young girl
with a rare blood disease called Diamond Blackfan Anemia, I could see
her demonstrate self-confidence about the message she wanted to spread.
She knew the characteristics and details of the disease and the role it plays
in the young girl’s life. After being inspired by watching an episode of
*Extreme Home Makeover*, Kristen taught many of her peers about her
passion, helping others.

Teresa taught the class about Oprah’s humble beginnings and how
they led her to organize The Leadership Academy For Girls in South
Africa. She also provided details in her Power Point presentation that in
some circumstances I could see a parallel to her own young life. Teresa
answered questions confidently as we gained new insight about the
television mogul. When Teresa told the class about the harsh treatment
Oprah sustained as a youngster, students removed their usual face of
boredom and replaced it with a look of concern and empathy. Dewey
asks, “How many students, for example were rendered callous to ideas,
and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which
learning was experienced by them?” (Dewey, 1938, p. 26). There were no
calluses visible in the classroom on any student when Teresa spoke.
Next Steps

As I peruse over all the data that I have collected during my study, I am mindful of the fact that the current generation of eighth graders are very open and understanding to their classmates. This is a generation that began their academic experience under the No Child Left Behind Act and all of the testing that goes along with it. This is a generation that has experienced and accepted full inclusion of students with disabilities into their classrooms. This is a generation that has seen more world events happen live than any other generation in history.

I am optimistic about the future of the young people in my study because they recognize the need to be challenged and a willingness to learn from each other. As I recall, I never had to remind any student to be quiet during any of the student presentations. None of the students who completed enrichment activities questioned me about their grade. I interpreted that to mean they did it for the intrinsic reward and personal satisfaction of learning something new. To me, that is what enrichment is all about.

Initially, when I first proposed the idea of differentiating up to meet the needs of advanced learners, I was met with the same response, “Let me know how that goes.” As I reflect back on my study, I believe that it went different from what I had expected. I visualized many
students jumping at the opportunity to gain the fundamental reward of learning something new. I envisioned intuitive students filling the seats of their local Board of Education meetings. Although none of that happened, I believe students benefitted from having the opportunity to enrich their civics education. How do I know? Because they keep asking for more to do.
References


Cramer, E., Nevin, A., Thousand, J., & Liston, A. (2006). Co-Teaching in urban school districts to meet the needs of all teachers and
learners: Implications for teacher education reform. Retrieved from ERIC database (ED491651)


Resources


Appendix A

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

June 8, 2011

Michael Perruso
2245 Kemmerer Street
Bethlehem, PA 18017

Re: HSIRB proposal by Michael Perruso for Richard Grove

Dear Michael Perruso:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: “Differentiating Classroom Instruction for Advanced Learners.” Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1379) or through e-mail (browerg@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee’s requests.

George D. Brower
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1379
Appendix B

August 11, 2011

Dear Mrs. Hetrick,

During the 2011 fall semester I will be completing action research as partial fulfillment toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. The research will assist me in implementing the most current and effective teaching strategies in order to provide a positive and meaningful learning experience for all of my civics students. Throughout the semester I am required to conduct a systematic study and reflect on my own teaching practice. The focus of my research is to implement differentiated instruction as a method to increase the academic level in my classroom. My goal is to implement differentiated strategies that will challenge advanced learners in my classroom.

I will be gathering information to support my study through observation, note taking, student and colleague interviews, questionnaires and student work samples. I anticipate that the data I collect will help me determine how I can better meet the needs of all my students. Only my name, the names of my sponsoring professor, and Moravian College will appear in this study. No other names will be included on any work samples or in any reports of my study. Some student work may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be kept securely in my possession. Likewise, all data gathered during the study will be shredded at the conclusion of my study.

All of the students in my classroom will receive the same instruction and assignments as part of the civics curriculum. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect any student's grade in any way. Students may withdrawal at any time simply by sending me an e-mail or letter stating their request. Or parent(s) may withdrawal their child by also stating their request via e-mail or letter. If a student does withdrawal I will not use any information associated with that student in my study. Furthermore, the student will absolutely not be penalized in any way. I have informed students during class about the options described above and goals of this study.

My faculty advisor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about my project, please feel free to speak with me at your earliest convenience. If there are no questions, please sign and return this letter. A copy will be provided to you. Thank you in advance for all of your help.

Sincerely,

Mr. Michael Perruso, Civics Teacher

I give permission for Michael Perruso to conduct the research study described above within the Warren Hills Middle School. I have read and understand this consent form and have received a copy.

Principal's Signature __________________________ Date __________________
September 7, 2011

Mr. Michael Perruso
WHR Middle School

Dear Mike:

At the regular meeting of the Warren Hills Regional Board of Education held Tuesday, September 6, 2011, your request to conduct an action research project in your classroom and to distribute the parental consent form to your students was approved.

On behalf of the board, administration and Warren Hills community, we wish you the best of luck completing your Master’s Degree.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Altonjy, Ed.D.
Superintendent

cc: Patricia Hetrick, Principal
Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

August 11, 2011

Dear 8™ Grade Civics Parents,

I am currently enrolled as a graduate student at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and am working toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. As part of my course work I am required to conduct a classroom study. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to use the data I collect from your son or daughter during my study. The data I collect will assist me in improving each student's educational experience.

The study will take place during the first marking period and within each of my civics classes. The focus of my research is to measure the effect of differentiated instruction. By doing this, I hope to provide an opportunity for your son or daughter to participate in an increased level of civics instruction. Only Moravian College, my sponsoring professors and I will appear by name in this study. Absolutely no student names will be included on work samples. To ensure your child's confidentiality I may alter some minor details of student writing or descriptions.

All of the students in my classroom will receive the same instruction and assignments as part of the civics curriculum. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect his or her grade in any way. If at any time you or your child wishes to withdraw from the study, simply send me an e-mail or letter stating your request. The information previously gathered will not be used in my study and your child will absolutely not be penalized in any way.

My faculty advisor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. I can be reached at 908-689-0750 or be e-mail at perrusom@warrenhills.org.

If you approve of your child being a participant in my teacher research, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Mr. Michael Perruso, Civics Teacher

I understand that Mr. Perruso will be observing and collecting data as part of his teacher research on differentiated instruction. My child has my permission to be a participant in this study.

Student Name (print) ___________________________________________ Date ____________

Parent/Guardian (print) ____________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature.
Appendix E

Immigration Web Quest
Enrichment Activity #1

This assignment is enrichment to enable deeper understanding in the civics curriculum. It is not mandatory. However, any work completed will be considered toward your marking period grade. You may complete one or all nine tasks.

Overview: Immigration in America began the moment the first explorers set foot in the new world and began colonizing. As our nation matured, the idea of American citizenship developed into what it is today. This web quest will help you understand a little bit more about the history of immigration in the United States, define the different stages of becoming a citizen and give you a chance to take the test given to those applying for citizenship. (icivics.org)

Procedure:
1. Go to www.icivics.org
2. Enter the term “immigration” in the search box
3. Click on the Immigration Web Quest
4. Follow slides 1-9
5. All work submitted must be word-processed and include your name and block.

Activities: Follow the directions on each slide as you develop a little better understanding about the history, impact and debate over immigration in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLIDE #</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>10 POINTS EACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slide #1</td>
<td>View the slide about three young newcomers to the US. Then choose any one newcomer to the US and in a few sentences explain why he or she came to America</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #2</td>
<td>Read this slide about the “push-pull” effect. Complete the “push-pull” chart and print it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #3</td>
<td>Read about the immigration quota and explain the meaning of the cartoon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #4</td>
<td>Read Becoming a US Citizen. Then list the requirements to become a naturalized citizen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #5</td>
<td>Read about the new “Green Cards.” Describe some changes to the new “Green Cards.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #6</td>
<td>Can you pass the test? Answer 10 questions on the sample immigration test. Record your results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #7</td>
<td>Watch the video with interviews about new Americans. Provide one memorable quote from each one of their stories. Provide each person’s name and the quote.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #8</td>
<td>Read about “The Immigration Debate.” Then compare and contrast the viewpoints of Erin Goheen &amp; Andres Gamboa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide #9</td>
<td>Listen or read the NPR story about the “Dream Act.” Explain what it is and the problems associated with it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL POINTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Enrichment Assignment #2

Brag About Your
Proclamation Project Choice

Instructions: This assignment contains two parts: a written paragraph highlighting the civic accomplishment of your choice for the Proclamation Award and a five slide Power Point presentation to the class describing your choice.

Your assignment is to:

1. **First, write a paragraph highlighting the accomplishment of your choice**
   
   **Paragraph** (20 points) Uses proper grammar, spelling and capitalization; provides details of the civic duty; explains why it is important
   
   Comments:

   Score:

2. **Second, create a five-slide power point presentation**
   
   **Power Point Presentation** (30 points) Contains minimum 3 illustrations overall; presentation is clear and easy to understand; parallels information provided in the paragraph
   
   Comments:

   Score:
Appendix G

Enrichment Assignment #3

THE INTERVIEW

Instructions:
1. Identify a person in your community or relative that gained their US citizenship by going through the Naturalization Process.
2. Request permission to interview them about their experience with the process.
3. Include a minimum of eight interview questions.
4. Conduct and record the interview. Use audiotapes, videotape or paper and pencil to record the answers. Recording on tape is not mandatory. Recordings are for your own use and must be approved by the person that you are interviewing.

PART I – One Paragraph Introduction (Must be word-processed)
• Write an introduction about the person that you interviewed by first developing a biography. (ie: name, age, country of origin and background).

PART II – Document the interview with your questions and the responses.
• State your question, then the response. Try to avoid yes and no responses. Dig deeper for more detailed answers.
• For example:
  Question: What were your first thoughts when you became a US citizen?
  Answer: I said to myself, now I can vote. I can choose the President of the United States.

PART III – One Paragraph Summary (must be word-processed)
• Include your thoughts and opinions about the interview and the answers you received. Did you agree or disagree with some of them? What surprised you about the person?
## Appendix G
### The Interview Assignment
#### Scoring Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXEMPLARY</th>
<th>STANDARD</th>
<th>ACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>NOT ACCEPT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>• <strong>Very</strong> interesting • Obtained <strong>all</strong> desired info. • <strong>Precisely</strong> followed format</td>
<td>• Obtained desired info. • Followed prescribed format</td>
<td>• Obtained some desired info. • Contains part of required format</td>
<td>• None provided • Did not follow format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUESTIONS</strong></td>
<td>• At least <strong>8</strong> questions • Very clever • <strong>Exactly</strong> on topic</td>
<td>• Less than 8 questions • Displays creativity • Remained on topic</td>
<td>• Few questions • Shows some creativity • Displayed topic at times</td>
<td>• No added questions • No creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERVIEW</strong></td>
<td>• <strong>Clearly</strong> documented &amp; detailed</td>
<td>• Appropriately documented</td>
<td>• Documented</td>
<td>• No documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMARY</strong></td>
<td>• <strong>Very Clear</strong> • <strong>Exactly</strong> on topic</td>
<td>• Interesting &amp; appealing • Remained on topic</td>
<td>• Some appeal • Displayed topic at times</td>
<td>• No summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Enrichment Assignment #4

TAKE A VETERAN TO SCHOOL DAY

Option #1 – BRING A VETERAN TO SCHOOL

A VISIT

Reach out to veteran. A military veteran is any person who served for any length of time in any military service branch. He or she can be a family member, friend, friend of a friend or neighbor. Ask if they would be interested in visiting our class to share their experiences as a veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Your task is to schedule and plan the entire visit. It will be extremely necessary to communicate your plans to me so that I ensure that school policies and protocol are followed.

Option #2 – ORAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Veterans are all around us – they are our family members, our neighbors, and our friends. They have diverse experiences in the armed forces, but all of them share a willingness to serve their country through military service. Some of them pursue long careers in the military, and others serve for a few years. The Library of Congress has a project devoted to preserving the memories and experiences of veterans through oral history. You can learn more about this effort at www.loc.gov/folklife/vets. Participation in the Library of Congress project is NOT mandatory. But the site does provide excellent suggestions and forms. For this activity, you can conduct your own oral history with a veteran or member of the military.

To start, find someone you know or that your family knows who has been or is in the military. Ask this person if they would be willing to talk to you about their experiences in the armed forces. When you find someone who would be interested in sharing their experience with you, conduct an oral history in which you ask them some questions about what they did or do in the military. Be sure to compile a list of questions before you start, and let your interviewee know how long you would like to talk to them. Take notes or, if possible, record this conversation so that you will be able to record these memories. Share what you have learned with your class in a presentation of 3-4 minutes.

Option #3 – POSTER

The United States military is comprised of several different branches, each of which has a distinct set of responsibilities. At the library or using the Internet, research the various branches of the military. Find out when each of these branches was founded and what tasks they are dedicated to providing. On a poster, describe these groups and their duties. You may want to decorate your poster with the symbols and mottos of the various armed forces, and with images of their seals.

Option #4 – DESEGREGATION IN THE MILITARY RESEARCH

The United States military is made up of people from all ages, races, and social backgrounds. This has not always been the case, however. Just as with other parts of our society, the military was once segregated and excluded some members on the basis of race. At the library or using the Internet, research the history of segregation in the military. Through your research, you should get a brief background on the participation of African-Americans and other people of color in the military before it was officially desegregated. Focus on the process of desegregation while doing your research. In what year was the military desegregated? What prompted the change? What groups advocated and opposed this transformation? In a brief one pager, describe the process of desegregation and the historical context in which it occurred.
Appendix I

Enrichment Assignment #5

MY HOMETOWN

Objective:
- Attend local governmental meetings
- Report on agenda items discussed and decisions made
- Choose agenda item to follow up on

Instructions:
View my school website for the web address of your local committee, council or school board meeting times and locations. Plan to attend a meeting, obtain an agenda, take notes and determine which agenda item you will follow up on. This assignment will extend throughout the second marking period.

Option #1:
Attend a township, borough, county or school board meeting and bring back an agenda signed by a member of the committee, council, freeholders or school board.

Option #2:
Complete the requirements of Option #1. Then create a one pager about what you observed at the meeting you attended. Provide details of what was discussed, who led the meeting, comments from the audience and decisions made. Provide your personal observations about the mannerisms, attitude and tone of the meeting. (Were people friendly, loud, welcoming?)

Option #3
Complete the requirements of Options 1 and 2. Then choose an agenda item that you wish to follow up on and report on it in a second one pager later in the marking period.