

The Importance of School-wide Enrichment Programs in Elementary School Settings

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Abstract

Due to the state of California's budget crisis with education, over the last several years, Gifted and Talented education programs have been cut across the state. As a result, students are being simply taught to take a test, and enrichment to students, those considered "gifted" and all others, is not being offered to the extent that is needed. The purpose of this study to examine how elementary schools should provide all students with enrichment opportunities, not only those in gifted and talented education programs. The previous literature on this topic shows that overall students involved in gifted and talented education program thrive and are better prepared for adulthood. They think more critically and are better challenged in school.

This study was conducted in a first grade classroom, in a Program Improvement elementary school. Twenty first graders participated in a week of enrichment activities centered around the theme of nutrition. The curriculum included hands-on activities on the topics of healthy eating, cooking, healthy meals and snacks. As children completed the activities the teacher-researcher made notes about student behavior and engagement. The researcher found that by providing the students with a more hands-on, enrichment centered curriculum the students were more motivated and interested in the curriculum and behavior problems decreased.

Chapter 1 Introduction

For the past four years in my school district I have seen the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs slowly begin to disappear. In my Title I, Program Improvement school there used to be a pull out program, once a week, during the school day taught by a district GATE teacher. The program at first was cut slightly and transformed into an after school program taught by the GATE teacher. Now, the district has a GATE coordinator who organizes teachers who sign up to teach enrichment classes for GATE students for six to eight week sessions after school. If teachers do not sign up to teach these enrichment classes, then the students do not have any type of GATE program. Last year I signed up to teach a painting enrichment class, despite the fact that I did not have specific training with Gifted and Talented Education. While I do believe that the students were somewhat enriched due to exposure to different artists and painting styles, I do not believe that my class took the place of a true GATE program.

It is assumed that teachers are differentiating within the classroom to accommodate the GATE students. However, with most of the emphasis in our Program Improvement school on the Basic and Below Basic level students, as indicated by the STAR test, I do not feel that most teachers are giving their GATE students the challenges and motivation they need. The GATE students are suffering and not achieving their potential.

School-wide enrichment programs are necessary for all students to be successful. In my own class, when I give my students the opportunity for enrichment, whether through painting, reading different forms of literature, or hands-on math extension activities, all students better enjoy school and have a stronger desire to succeed.

Statement of Problem

Students in Program Improvement schools are not being challenged due to much emphasis being put on raising test scores. Advanced students especially are suffering due to the severe cutting of gifted and talented education (GATE) programs.

Advanced students are those that typically score at the Advanced level on the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test, and have above normal aptitude for academics, usually tested by different aptitude test, such as the Raven Aptitude test. Many schools in Program Improvement status, under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act put heavy emphasis on reaching the at-risk students, those scoring at the Basic and Below Basic level. All students in these schools are suffering as they are being “taught to the test” and not being given ample opportunities for enrichment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is advocate for enrichment programs in Program Improvement and other schools. All students in Program Improvement schools need more opportunities for enrichment. By advocating for enrichment programs in schools designated Program Improvement then all students will be given the opportunities that are lacking due to current budget conditions.

Research Question

What strengths does the enrichment curricula, typically found in GATE programs, offer to the whole school setting? Do students find enrichment curriculum more intriguing than the basic basal text selection for reading, and state-adopted math curriculum? Would Program Improvement schools benefit from the implantation of a school-wide enrichment curriculum?

Theoretical Rationale

The basis for this research question stems from Joseph Renzulli's research regarding gifted and talented education. Renzulli's (2005) research describes a broadened conception of giftedness. According to Renzulli, giftedness is not a unitary concept, there is not a single definition for it. Rather it is developed over time and culture, abilities, environment, gender, opportunities, and chance all contribute to the development of gifts and talents (Sternberg & Davidson, as cited in Renzulli, 2005). The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (1977) promotes an increase in student effort as well as enjoyment and an increase in performance (Renzulli, 2005). This approach to giftedness in students stems from the belief that all should have the opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills (Renzulli, 2005). The idea that special services in schools should be viewed as opportunities to develop the gifted behaviors rather than only discovering and certifying them is consistent with the intent to advocated for GATE programs in school settings, especially Program Improvement schools settings.

Renzulli's Three Ring Conception of Giftedness suggests that there are three basic traits which characterize gifted or advanced students. These traits are: above average through not necessarily superior general ability; a high level of task commitment or intrinsic motivation; creativity (Renzulli, 2005). These factors are thought to overlap each other, with the area for most gifted behaviors falling in the middle of all three areas. Renzulli's (2005) Three Ring Conception of Giftedness and his Total Talent developmental model show that special consideration should be given to schools that serve English Learners, have students that are limited economically, or schools in which attendance is in poor quality. However, the theory behind the Schoolwide Enrichment Model as discussed by Reis & Renzulli (2003) is that the label of "gifted" should be placed on the service, and not on the student. It is meant to focus on

the talents of all the students, not only those who fall into the category of “gifted.” It is the belief of the purpose of this study that all schools benefit from having Gifted and Talented Education programs.

Assumptions

An assumption I hold about my research question is that GATE students are unmotivated when they are not being given GATE level projects and are bored in the regular classroom if the curriculum is not being differentiated based on their level of need. Another assumption I hold is that Program Improvement schools primarily focus on the Basic to Below Basic level student in hopes of raising test scores. It is also assumed that because there is a large amount of focus on primarily improving test scores that teachers are not able to dedicate the desired amount of time to differentiating within the classroom for GATE students.

Background and Need

GATE programs have been cut from budgets all around the state of California. This is not only a local problem, but a global one, as schools need to provide opportunities for gifted and all students to be able to develop their talents and skills. Renzulli’s (2005) Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is a program designed to provide schoolwide opportunities for all students to develop their talents. By examining a successful model of gifted and talented education the benefits for enrichment programs in schools can be clearly identified. SEM focuses on the development of academic and creative-productive giftedness, rather than test scores showing a student’s aptitude (Renzulli, 2005).

Renzulli’s research since 1977 has shown that gifted students are those that fit into the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, as explained above. The curricular basis of SEM is the

Enrichment Triad Model (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). Type I of this model is general exploratory activities. During this phase students are exposed to many different fields of interest to stimulate new interests. Type II involves group training activities. During this time students are exposed to creative thinking and problem solving, critical thinking, and affective processes. They are involved in a wide variety of specific learning of how-to-learn skills to help them move towards application and creation in their new interests gained during Type I activities. Type III is individual and small group investigations of real problems. This is the highest level of enrichment in which students apply the knowledge they have gained towards solving real life problems in their particular area of interest (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). The Enrichment Triad Model would be able to best serve all students in schools where more opportunities to create enrichment opportunities are needed.

According to Reis and Renzulli's (2003) SEM 10-15% of above-average ability/high potential students are identified through a variety of measures including: achievement tests, teacher nominations, assessment of potential for creativity and task commitment, and alternative pathways of entrance. Students then have their interest and learning style assessed through the Total Talent Portfolio. The second step is curriculum compacting in which other forms of differentiation and curricular modifications are provided to all eligible students. The SEM does not replace curriculum, but rather works in conjunction with the standard curriculum taught in the school. The third step is a series of enrichment opportunities organized around the Enrichment Triad Model, which provides ample opportunities for enrichment for the student (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). All students would be best served by the SEM and the Enrichment Triad Model, not only those designated gifted and talented.

In a review of empirical studies on giftedness by Ziegler and Raul (2000), it was found that overall, there studies on giftedness do not have a clear, common language or front that unites them. The study set out to determine who is being investigated by giftedness researchers, which research questions are being most frequently posed, and to characterize these empirical studies with respect to the methodological techniques employed. In a review of 90 empirical studies, it was found that the research questions employed by researchers on giftedness widely differ, as well as the methods used (Ziegler & Raul, 200). Most of the research questions were focused on career development and achievement variables, as well as motivation, emotion, self-concept, personality, and behavior. No studies examined the need for school-wide enrichment (Ziegler & Raul, 2000). There is also no clear, uniform method for identifying gifted students (Ziegler & Raul, 2000). This is a problem because there is not a consistent basis when reading literature on giftedness. There needs to be more research done on enrichment in schools and how to best determine the benefits of gifted and talented education.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

Previous research regarding gifted and talented education models as well as enrichment models has focused on a wide-range of subjects regarding students within the area of giftedness. This chapter reviews the history of gifted and talented education in the United States to provide an overview of students' exposure to GATE education. For the purposes of this study the review of the literature focuses on the success of students identified as gifted and talented, the issue of ethnically diverse students being largely underrepresented in the area of gifted and talented education, and successful school-wide models of enrichment.

History of Gifted and Talented Education in the United States

Just as much of education swings back and forth as a pendulum in the United States, so does the history concerning the gifted and talented. Gifted students have always been recognized, dating back as far as 1868, in which the St. Louis public school system, under the leadership of William Torrey Harris, designed a system for early grade promotion for those deemed "gifted" (Jolly, 2009)

However, it was the 1920s and 1930s which saw a considerable amount of research conducted on gifted education (Jolly, 2009). There was university support and research money dedicated to the topic. Leta Stetter Hollingworth and Lewis Terman were some of the first researchers to establish characteristics for gifted behavior, develop a definition of giftedness, and create guidelines for school programming concerning gifted students (Jolly, 2009). During this time Hollingworth and Terman's definitions of giftedness were primarily linked to a child's intelligence and their IQ score (Jolly, 2009).

After World War II research on giftedness was at a low, but the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet's in 1957 sparked government interest on the gifted once again (Jolly, 2009). Along with Sputnik, the education system was under great scrutiny for a lack of rigor in the educational programs (Jolly, 2009). This prompted the U.S. Congress to pass the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This act outlined "better provisions for our talented youth" (Barbe as cited by Jolly, 2009). An increase in gifted and talented education bloomed as a result of NDEA, as well as money dedicated to schools for the education of the gifted. Under NDEA was Title V, which earmarked funds for guidance, counseling, testing, and identification and encouragement of gifted students (Jolly, 2009).

During the 1950s, the area of psychology focused a great deal on the idea of giftedness. As giftedness was previously based on intelligence and IQ scores, the field of psychology began to search for a long-standing conception of giftedness and searched for a comprehensive theory of giftedness (Jolly, 2009). The psychologist J.P. Guilford developed the Structure of the Intellect (SOI), which identified 120 different intellectual abilities that one could hold. Guilford was a pioneer in the study as creativity as a component of giftedness (Jolly, 2009). Along with Guilford were E.P. Torrance, J.W. Getzels, and Phillip Jackson, all of whom researched the relationship between giftedness and creativity (Jolly, 2009). This research on creativity continued well into the 1960s.

In 1960, at the White House Conference on Children several ideas concerning gifted education were brought forth. These ideas included: schools would be required to make special provisions for the gifted; state departments assume greater responsibility of gifted education; teachers acquire better understanding of the gifted; and that more sensitive means of identification be developed (Jolly, 2009).

As a result of NDEA, in schools across the United States there was implementation of enrichment, special grouping for gifted students, and the ideas of acceleration for gifted students was expanded (Jolly, 2009). Enrichment was inexpensive and allowed gifted students to continue to be with their peers in the classroom, but teachers found it difficult to assemble the materials on top of their classroom duties (Jolly, 2009). Several special schools were created, especially schools of music, during this time for gifted students. Most of the implementation of such programs for gifted students occurred in secondary schools, such as honors and advanced placement classes. Missing out on the benefits of NDEA was minority students, those of low socio-economic status, and rural groups (Jolly, 2009).

Teacher training of gifted students during the 1960s was virtually non-existent in teacher preparatory programs (Jolly, 2009). Any training on gifted students usually occurred during workshops or summer sessions, and was left up to the discretion of the states. By 1960, 11 states had full- or part-time directors of gifted education, and by the mid-1960s half of all state departments of education had people who were assigned to needs of gifted education (Jolly, 2009).

Once the United States launched its own satellites into space funding for gifted education began to disappear. The Civil Rights movement led to favor of equity and the needs of special education students (Jolly, 2009).

In 1972 a federal definition of giftedness was formally issued. This definition included that giftedness incorporated: 1) general intellectual ability, 2) specific academic aptitude, 3) creative or productive thinking, 4) leadership ability, 5) visual and performing arts, 6) psychomotor ability (Jolly, 2009).

Along with the United States launching its own satellites, the Omnibus Reconciliation Act diminished funding for gifted programs. However, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Act of 1988 and the *National Excellence* report in 1993 demonstrated the lack of interest in the academic needs of gifted children, and some funding was provided to states for gifted programming (Jolly, 2009).

Since these acts, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which primarily focuses on all students scoring proficient, has once again led to a decrease of the focus on gifted education (Jolly, 2009). Currently, the United States has been involved in the creation of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) project, to encourage students to pursue studies and careers in the science and mathematical fields (Jolly, 2009). However, government funding is not a part of this project; rather private corporations are funding the project.

Success of Students Identified as Gifted and Talented

Morgan (2007) examined the effects of a group of gifted and talented students receiving a pull-out cluster experience during the school day. Parents, teachers, and students feedback on the experience was examined, as well as if the gifted cluster had an impact upon the student's academic attainment or social development. Most of the literature regarding GATE education regards pull-out programs with a negative affect and most studies do not address the feedback of teachers and programs, so this study set out to examine those aspects (Morgan, 2007).

The study participants consisted of 24 students ages 5 to 7. They had all been identified as gifted by their mainstream schools and then referred to the cluster. The theoretical frameworks used throughout the program consisted of assessment measures based on Renzulli's (2005) three ring conception of giftedness; evaluation sheets related to Bloom's higher levels of

thinking (Renzulli, 2005); and designing activities intended to address different areas of intelligence as identified in Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Morgan, 2007).

The study conducted parent interviews between February and March 2006, in which both open-ended and closed questions were asked. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Surveys were administered to the teachers of the children attending the gifted cluster, and the surveys consisted of both open-ended and closed questions. The activities with the children were evaluated by having the children rate the gate cluster and school activities, staff and outcomes on a scale of one to five. The mean ratings for the whole sample were calculated from these rating activities. Other activities included having the students take photographs of their favorite activities and then as soon as they were developed having the children discuss the photos. Also, interviews with pairs of children were used, and the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The main analysis used was quantitative analysis of datasets in combination of the teacher surveys, parent interviews, child activities and child interviews.

The study found that overall neither parents or teachers were concerned about the students being withdrawn from their regular classroom to attend the cluster (Morgan, 2007). The children reported enjoying the cluster and reported that the activities in the cluster were more enjoyable than those in their regular school. Parents also reported being satisfied with the work the children participated in during the gifted cluster (Morgan, 2007). Overall, there were very few negative comments about the cluster from parents. Almost all parents felt that their children had benefited academically from the cluster and a higher proportion of parents reported positive outcomes than teachers (Morgan, 2007). Several parents felt that socially their children were more developed as a result of the cluster (Morgan, 2007). Most of the children rated their learning at the cluster slightly higher than their learning at school.

Overall, the gifted cluster was considered positive, which previous research has not necessarily been seen. Very few studies have examined the effect of a gifted and talented program for younger students. The varied teaching and learning styles that differed from school activities were valued by parents, teachers, and children (Morgan, 2007). There is some evidence that the nature of the gifted and talented program was significant (Morgan, 2007). As the children were in a “cluster,” this meant that they were given the opportunity to interact with other gifted and talented children, which was perceived to be important. This is evidence for the fact that parents and teachers value gifted and talented education, and that it is important for the programs to be considered during the regular school day. Further research needs to be done to show the positive effects of enrichment in the regular classroom setting.

Information about gifted adults’ academic and interpersonal experiences in advanced classes ranging from elementary to college has been gathered in various studies. The authors of one study investigated how the perception of advanced classes by gifted adults would impact their attitudes toward advanced placement for their children (Perrone, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannattar, 2010). Much of the literature shows that students placed in advanced classes academically and socially excel, but not much research is done from the adults’ perspective. The study participants consisted of 88 adults (33 men and 55 women), ages 35-37, who have been participating in a longitudinal study since they graduated from high school (Perrone et al., 2010). The information was collected from surveys sent out to participant through the U.S. Mail system. The survey had a 73% response rate. The methodology consisted of a qualitative analysis in which the researchers came up with categories for the responses based on the questions and coded each response. The study found that overall, 85% of the participants indicated that their academic experiences in advanced classes were positive, 14% indicated that they were negative,

and 1% said their experiences were neutral (Perrone et al., 2010). Fifty nine percent indicated positive interpersonal experiences being in advanced classes, 22% indicated negative interpersonal experiences, 10% indicated they had mixed experiences, and 9% indicated their experiences were neutral. Overall, 88% indicated that they would want their children to be placed in advanced classes. The implications for this study show that overall, adults reflecting back on their experiences in advanced classes feel that their experiences were beneficial and would like their children to also participate in advanced classes. This is important, as it shows that children do need opportunities in gifted/advanced classes.

Ethnically Diverse Students Underrepresented in Gifted and Talented Models

Due to recent reform in England regarding gifted and talented education, a study examined students in the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) at the University of Warwick in 2002 (Campbell, Muijis, Neelands, Robinson, Eyre & Hewston, 2007). The major function of this academy was to identify and support the needs of the “top 5%” of secondary students. The sample was just over 37,000 students. The study broke the participants down into groups based on their socio-economic status (SES). The study found that the highest SES group is over-represented among the gifted and talented cohort compared to the population as a whole (Campbell et al., 2007). The lowest two groups are underrepresented in the study. Overall, this study found that while the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth has a student membership skewed towards groups with high levels of cultural and economic capital, and only 8% of students identified as gifted and talented coming from the poorest areas in the country (Campbell et al., 2007). This is significant research to show that ethnically diverse students are largely underrepresented in studies on gifted and talented education. My own study will look at

students in Program Improvement schools, which consist of large populations of ethnically diverse students.

Callahan (2005) focused on solutions to help solve the problem that populations, such as American Indians, Native Alaskans, Black and Hispanic students, have been underrepresented as being identified as gifted. The author suggests that instead of trying to find one solution to the problem, there are a variety of solutions that should be employed (Callahan, 2005).

One solution posed is to expand conceptions of intelligence and giftedness. By looking at Gardner's as cited by Callahan (2005) study of creative and productive adults, it can be seen that there are other constructs of intelligence, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial abilities, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal talents, which should be considered when discussing giftedness. Also, giftedness should not be considered to be in all realms of performance, but that giftedness can exist in certain areas (Callahan, 2005). Another solution proposed is to provide exemplars of gifted performance and use the identification process to enhance understanding. Teachers should be provided with different examples of students from the target populations exhibiting the behaviors associated with all aspects of talent, not only verbal ability (Callahan, 2005).

By developing a program for talent development, schools could include all children in an enrichment cluster, and this should be developed in the primary grades. Also, students should be identified early and often, so that the gaps that exist between students from the middle-class, White populations and poor, minority populations do continue to widen (Callahan, 2005). The assessments used to identify giftedness should not be limited to a one-shot, paper-and-pencil assessment. The tools used to identify students should be valid and reliable, and the assessments should be authentic (Callahan, 2005).

The data used to identify giftedness should be gathered over a period of time and portfolios should be used to show results (Callahan, 2005). Procedures should be rewritten for nomination, screening, and identifying students to reflect an inclusive, expanded definition of giftedness. Parents should be involved in the identification and placement process, to give them a buy in and an understanding of the process and the program (Callahan, 2005). The identification of giftedness should not only lead to a label of giftedness, but should ensure that the curriculum the students are to receive matches their ability (Callahan, 2005). Lastly, the curriculum and services should match to the identification procedure (Callahan, 2005). Many students in program improvement schools are from underrepresented populations. These students need to be fairly identified and the curriculum needs to be in alignment with the way they are identified.

Reis and Boeve (2009) examined an afterschool enriched reading program for academically gifted urban students who had also been identified as talented readers. Previous studies show that in urban schools where the majority of students are not reading at grade level, the curriculum is not being differentiated to meet the needs to academically gifted students. This study wanted to see how these gifted students would respond to a challenging reading program. The participants consisted of five students in Grades 3-5 who had been previously identified as academically talented according to state criteria, as well as talented in reading. The study methodology consisted of data collection through interviews and observations, including in-depth case studies as well as quantitative data, using a nonparametric data analysis. The program consisted of a 90 minute, afterschool intervention using the SEM-R (Schoolwide Enrichment Model-Reading Framework), for six weeks, two afternoons a week. The study found that the students reading fluency scores did not reflect what would be expected of gifted reading students

(Reis & Boeve, 2009). Over the course of the six weeks the students made significant gains with their reading fluency scores (Reis & Boeve, 2009). All five of the students had significantly difficult time reading challenging reading material that was at their level. They lost interest in the books, said they were “boring,” and most chose to read books that were significantly below their reading level (Reis & Boeve, 2009). It was also found that when students appeared to be reading more challenging material, they often could not answer relatively easy comprehension questions (Reis & Boeve, 2009). The studies implications show that urban students who are considered gifted have the need, ultimately, to be challenged in the regular school setting. When not challenged they lack the motivation to push themselves to more challenging material. Gifted students in Program Improvement schools need to have some type of consistent GATE program.

Previous research shows that ethnically diverse children are widely underrepresented in the area of gifted and talented education. One reason for this may be due to the means of identifying ethnically diverse children as gifted. Many of the intelligence measures prove to be biased against ethnically diverse children. This study’s purpose conducted by Lewis, DeCamp-Fritson, Ramage, McFarland & Archwamety (2007), was to compare the effectiveness of the Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices, the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in selecting for ethnically diverse students who may be gifted. The Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices and the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test both have been found to be useful tools in selecting for ethnically diverse students who may be gifted (Lewis et al., 2007). The sample in this study consisted of 175 students in grades 3-5 and grade 8 in a Midwestern school district. The school was chosen because of its large Hispanic population (40%). The students were placed in one of two categories, Caucasian, or Ethnically Diverse. The Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices and the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test were given to

participants, and archival scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were retrieved. Students' scores on the Raven's, the NNAT, and the ITBS were compared to determine which assessment identified the greatest number of students in each cultural category at or above the 80th percentile level.

The study found that the Raven's identified 54% more gifted Caucasian children than the Ethnically Diverse children, the NNAT identified 262% and the ITBS identified 370% more Caucasian children (Lewis et al., 2007). The Raven's identified 560% more potentially gifted children from diverse background than either NNAT or the ITBS tests (Lewis et al., 2007). The study found that the Raven's, the NNAT, and the ITBS are not equally effective in selecting potentially gifted children (Lewis et al., 2007). The ITBS identified the lowest percentage of potentially gifted children, while the Raven's selected more ethnically diverse students (Lewis et al., 2007).

This study is important to my own research because the Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices should be used to help identify gifted children in Program Improvement schools, and should be given to whole classes to help in identifying all children who have the possibility to succeed within an enrichment model.

Successful School-wide Enrichment Models

The Sutterville Elementary School in Sacramento, California began using the School-Wide Success (SWS) model to individualize and differentiate instruction in English language arts to K-6 students in small group settings (Boutelle, 2008). The school received training from the Excellence- a Commitment to Every Learner (ExCEL) program. At the beginning of each year all students are placed into flexible groupings using a variety of academic assessments. Through

the program the teachers are able to differentiate their instruction based on the needs of their students (Boutelle, 2008). The teachers have weekly grade-level meetings to collaborate and discuss about curriculum and individual students. The schools STAR test scores and English language assessments have improved due to the program (Boutelle, 2008). The students reported liking the model. Using the SWS model in conjunction with the SEM model would allow for greater student enrichment in a regular classroom setting.

Statistical Data

From the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), the percentage and number of gifted and talented students in public elementary and secondary schools, compared to the United States as a whole:

Percentages of students in gifted and talented programs in public schools in U.S. compared to California:

2004: U.S.: 6.7% (3,202,760 students) California: 8.4% (527,370 students)

2006: U.S.: 6.7% California: 8.3% (523,450 students)

Percentages of girls and boys involved in gifted and talented programs in California:

2004: Boys: 8.0% Girls: 8.8%

2006: Boys: 8.0% Girls: 8.6%

Looking at race and ethnicity the percentages break down as follows:

	2004	2006
White	12.0%	11.9%
Black	4.6 %	4.3 %
Hispanic	5.1 %	4.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.6 %	16.1%

Overall, the percentages of both girls and boys in gifted and talented education in California have decreased between the years of 2004 and 2006. There could be many reasons attributed to this, but a major reason is most likely budget cuts to the gifted and talented programs across the state. Overall, it is important that gifted and talented education programs are advocated for and continue in the regular classroom through some type of enrichment model.

Administrative Records

According to the California Department of Education (C.D.E) (2010), the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program is meant to provide funding for local education agencies to develop “unique education opportunities for high-achieving and underachieving pupils in California public elementary and secondary schools who have been identified as gifted and talented.” This is according to the Education Code sections 52200-52212. It also states that special efforts are made to ensure that pupils from economically disadvantaged and varying cultural backgrounds are provided with full participation in these opportunities (C.D.E., 2010)

The website provides a “Gifted and Talented Education Program Resource Guide.” This resource guide states that each school district’s governing board is able to determine the criteria it will use to identify students for participation in the GATE program. The categories stated for

identification may include: intellectual, creative, specific academic, or leadership ability; high achievement; performing and visual arts talent; or any other criterion that meets the standards provided by the State Board of Education (C.D.E., 2010).

According to the resource guide the elements that all GATE programs should include are:

1. Differentiated opportunities for learning that measure up with the gifted and talented pupils' particular abilities and talents
2. Alternative learning environments in which gifted and talented pupils can acquire skills and understanding at advanced ideological and creative levels equal with their potentials
3. Elements that help gifted and talented pupils develop sensitivity and responsibility to others
4. Elements that help to develop a commitment in gifted and talented pupils to constructive ethical standards
5. Elements that assist gifted and talented pupils to develop self-generating problem-solving abilities to expand each pupil's awareness of choices for satisfying contributions in his or her environment
6. Elements that help gifted and talented pupils develop realistic, healthy self concepts. The types of GATE program service options, according to the resource guide may consist of special day classes, part time groupings, or cluster groupings. Also, the GATE program services maybe be augmented or supplemented by using strategies such as independent study, acceleration, postsecondary education, or enrichment (C.D.E., 2010).

The California State Board of Education created a set of recommended standards for programs for Gifted and Talented Students. The standards set forth lay out the basic groundwork

that needs to be covered by districts when creating their gifted and talented program. The standards include:

1. Program Design: Districts provide a comprehensive continuum of services and program options responsive to the needs, interests, and abilities of gifted students based on philosophical, theoretical, and empirical support. (EC 52205[d] and 52206[a])
2. Identification: The district's identification procedures are equitable, comprehensive, and ongoing. They reflect the district's definition of giftedness and its relationship to current state criteria. (EC 52202: Title 5 Regulations, Section 3822)
3. Curriculum and Instruction: Districts develop differentiated curriculum, instructional models and strategies that are aligned with and extend the state academic content standards and curriculum frameworks. The differentiated curriculum is related to theories, models, and practices from the recognized literature in the field. (EC 52206[a] and 52206[b])
4. Social and Emotional Development: Districts establish and implement plans to support the social and emotional development of gifted learners to increase responsibility, self-awareness, and other issues of affective development. (EC 52212[a][1])
5. Professional Development: Districts provide professional development opportunities related to gifted education to administrators, teachers and staff to support and improve educational opportunities for gifted students. (EC 52212[a][1])
6. Parent and Community Involvement: Districts provide procedures to ensure consistent participation of parents and community members in the planning and evaluation of programs for gifted students. (EC 52205[2][f])

7. Program Assessment: Districts establish formal and informal evaluation methods and instruments that assess the gifted program and the performance of gifted students (which meets or exceeds state content standards). Results of data collected, including state standardized tests, are used to study the value and impact of the services provided and to improve gifted programs and gifted student performance. (EC 52212[a][1])
8. Budgets: District budgets for gifted programs support and provide for all the components of the district's GATE program and meet the related standards. (EC 52209, 52212[a][1], [2], [3]) (C.D.E., 2010).

Special Collections

The University of Connecticut has developed "The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented" (NRC/GT). This research center is undergoing a five-year research plan, which aims to identify empirical and descriptive data of "what works in gifted education." The plan consists of the integrated study of identification systems, model-based curricula in reading and math, and assessments (University of Connecticut, 2010).

Led by Dr. Joseph Renzulli of the University of Connecticut and Dr. Carolyn Callahan of the University of Virginia, the research study is aiming to: a) extend and enhance prior studies by developing a defensible identification system; b) analyze the effects of curricular units in reading and math on students identified using traditional and expanded criteria; and c) measure outcomes using extended standards-based assessments, structured performance assessments, or standardized achievement measures (University of Connecticut, 2010). The identification system has been created to respond to students from all cultural groups and all socioeconomic groups.

The research began in the spring of 2008, during which a group of second grade students were identified using the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Cognitive Abilities Test, and teacher rating scales. This group of students has been participating in the math or reading curriculum (randomly assigned at the school level) in third grade (2008-2009 academic year). In the spring of 2009, a second group of second grade students were identified using the same criteria, and they have been participating in the reading or math curriculum during the 2009-2010 academic year (University of Connecticut, 2010).

The model-based curriculum in reading is based on the Differentiation of Instruction Model, Depth and Complexity Model, and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (University of Connecticut, 2010). Various persons of administration concerning gifted education have nominated a sample of districts across the nation who implements gifted and talented programs. The schools have been selected to represent rural, suburban, and urban schools of varying socioeconomic levels with diverse populations.

The students will all be assessed at the end of third grade on measures using existing state standards and assessments to reflect expectations for advanced levels of achievement in reading and math, as well as measures based on performance of investigative and problem-solving skills (University of Connecticut, 2010).

The research center is trying to determine if expanding the identification criteria will result in the identification of a greater number of students from under-represented groups than traditional identification criteria and if identified students who receive the model-based curriculum will outperform students who receive their school's general education curriculum on the extended standard-based assessments, the structured performance assessments, and/or standardized achievement measures (University of Connecticut, 2010). They are also looking at

whether or not students identified by traditional criteria will outperform students identified by the expanded criteria on standardized measures of reading and math achievement and performance-based measures, and if there are any interactions between treatment condition and identification criteria on standardized measures of reading and math achievement and performance-based measures. The last research questions the center is looking at are if the delivery of the model-based intervention enhance or hinder the achievement of the non-identified students in the treatment classes and do non-identified students in the treatment classes perform as well as non-identified students in non-treatment classes on standardized measures of reading and math achievement (University of Connecticut, 2010). Lastly, the center is seeking out how do personal and environmental factors shape teachers' implementation of model-based curriculum units in reading and math and how do teachers' personal characteristics shape understanding and implementation of the curriculum (University of Connecticut, 2010).

Interview with an Expert

Sample and Site

The sample in this study consisted of one GATE teacher and coordinator from the Wright District in Santa Rosa, California.

Access and Permissions

The researcher had access to this district GATE teacher and coordinator from her position as a teacher in the Wright School District. She contacted the subject by email and asked if he would be willing to participate in her study. The subject was given full disclosure of the researcher's topic of study and gave permission to be interviewed.

Ethical Standards

This research study adheres to the principles for protection of human subjects as indicated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University Institutional Review Board (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 8214.

Gregory Talen, Wright District Gifted and Talented Coordinator (personal communication, December 5, 2010)

Gregory Talen (pseudonym) has worked in education for more than thirty years. He has always been an avid advocate for enrichment programs for not only gifted and talented students, but all students as well.

Talen first taught in Forestville, California, back when he recalls, “there was money for GATE programs.” Due to this available money provided by the government, Talen would write a proposal for an after-school enrichment class and then submit his proposal to a committee. It was in Forestville that Talen began enrichment programs after school like Chess Club and Creek Club. He also began having students work after school on a History Day project, which is a nationwide competition in which students are able to show their expertise on an element of history.

There was no common identification between school districts for identifying gifted and talented students, so Jeff would also extend his after school programs to any students who showed an interest. Eventually, things shifted and the government cut the funds for these GATE programs so the Forestville community established a nonprofit organization to help keep the programs alive. The students interested had to pay five dollars a session for eight weeks to participate in the enrichment programs.

After working in Forestville, Talen began teaching at Helen Lehman School, in the Santa Rosa City Schools District. Upon arriving at Helen Lehman School Talen saw that there was no GATE program established. He has always experience that there are minimal pull-out programs for those determined “GATE,” but consistent with research, as a teacher he did not prefer the pull-out model. The Santa Rosa City Schools district decided to allocate money for the GATE program while Talen was teaching there, so he again began after school enrichment programs like History Day and Chess Club again.

Talen is now currently the Wright School District GATE coordinator. The Wright School District is composed of three small schools, two K-6, and one a K-8. Upon being hired Talen’s job description was to 1) reinstate Odyssey of the Mind (a GATE competition) in the district; 2) establish an after school enrichment program; 3) identify the GATE students within the district; and 4) teach one enrichment class at each school. The criterion for identifying GATE students has evolved over Talen’s two years in the position. For identification the district uses the students’ scores on the STAR test, teacher recommendation, and a score on the Raven test for their age. However, Talen does not limit only GATE students to the after school enrichment classes. “If a student is really interested in what we are doing, why would I deny them that?” he stated.

Teachers are offered opportunities to sign up to teach the after school enrichment classes. However, not many teachers do sign up. Also, the budget for such classes is greatly being cut, and Talen said that he was told his position as GATE coordinator might not even exist next year.

Talen believes that there are many benefits of enrichment programs for students. He believes that the students get a challenge that they normally do not receive in the classroom. Also, what they are doing in the enrichment class is different than what they are doing in their

regular classroom. He believes that all the experiences with the enrichment classes are very positive because the students feel positive about what they are doing. Also, something very important he believes is that the students are getting acquainted with another safe adult. It is one more adult that has a positive influence in their life that they normally wouldn't know.

Talen exclaimed that he doesn't see much enrichment in the regular classroom. New teachers he explained, are still figuring things out, and trying to learn the basic curriculum. Veteran teachers are more able to challenge children more, and they raise the bar a bit, so that their students are more challenged. More often than not, what Talen sees in terms of enrichment in the regular classroom is the teacher providing a challenge to the more advanced student, such as extending assignments to make them more interesting for GATE students. This does not constitute enrichment. When asked about enrichment classes being taught during the regular school day Jeff believes that it can be done, but not very successfully. He believes there are negative aspects for teachers, such as losing time with their own class, having one more thing to plan for. "If school got out at five o'clock, then maybe we could fit enrichment in," Talen said. In Talen's experience teachers are not always comfortable or willing to be flexible, which is a problem if you are trying to include enrichment classes in the regular school day.

Talen believes that after school enrichment programs can be especially beneficial in Program Improvement schools because it helps to establish a connection between parents and the school. These programs can help to show parents in Program Improvement schools how hard their students can work.

I originally thought of after school enrichment classes as having a disadvantage for students who have parents who cannot pick them up, or are not willing to let their child stay after school. Talen does not see the after school programs as a disadvantage at all, and he has been

providing them for more than thirty years. This did change the way I viewed enrichment programs a bit.

When discussing the current issues of the cutting of gifted and talented education programs Talen believes that the California GATE council needs to put pressure on the state government to provide money. “Our society is putting so much effort, time, and energy into the lower end of the spectrum; it’s so out of balance.” With No Child Left Behind, so much emphasis is on those students who need to be brought up, which cannot be ignored, but those students on the opposite end, the more advanced students, are now being ignored, and Talen feels that there needs to be much more balance.

My interview with Talen really opened my eyes to how bad the budget is for gifted and talented education in California, and that after school enrichment programs are not such a bad way to address the needs of students who are in need of a more challenging program.

Summary

Gifted and Talented Education is an important part of education in a child’s life and especially to those students who are not given enrichment opportunities outside of the school setting, as seen by the previous research. Students in Program Improvement schools should be provided with enrichment opportunities within the regular classroom setting.

Chapter 3 Method

The purpose of this research was to advocate for enrichment education in the regular school setting. The researcher sought out to examine the effects that enrichment education has in the regular classroom setting as well as examine how enrichment education in the regular classroom setting has an effect on children who are not normally exposed to enrichment. The researcher used a mixed methods approach to the research by conducting action research, documenting how the action of providing enrichment during the regular school day affected the students' performance. Also used were follow-up interviews with the students, focusing on their experiences with the enrichment in the classroom.

This study was conducted in the researcher's own first grade classroom. The data collection for this research included personal observations, interviews with students and other colleagues and teachers. The researcher's personal observations come from five years of teaching experience in Title I elementary schools and personal experience spent in GATE programs.

Sample & Site

The research for this study was collected from a first grade classroom at the Wright Charter School in Santa Rosa, California. Wright Charter School is a K-8 charter school within the Wright School District, with approximately 500 students. The school is currently in its second year of Program Improvement, as designated by standards set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is also a Title I school, which is a school that is provided extra funding by the government to schools with low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to the schools website, data from the 2009-2010 school year showed that approximately seventy-eight percent of the school's students participate in the Federal Government's Free and Reduced

Lunch Program. Fifty-two percent of the students are considered English Language Learners (Wright School Governance Council, 2010).

The researcher used a sample of convenience, by using their own classroom. The first grade classroom from which data was collected was composed of 20, six to seven-year olds. There are 11 girls and 9 boys. There are 12 Hispanic students, seven Caucasian students, and one African American student. Approximately 55% of the class receives free or reduced lunch during the school day.

Access and Permissions

Access to the site and sample in this study was gained by the researcher being an employee of the Wright School District and current standing as a first grade teacher at Wright Charter School.

Ethical Standards

This study adhered to the ethical standards from the American Psychological Association (2010), in the protection of human subjects. A proposal was submitted and reviewed by the director of the master's program, and received approval.

Data Gathering Strategies

The researcher sought qualitative data through an action research plan. The majority of the data was collected through classroom observations. Informal observations occurred over the course of one week. Notes were taken by the researcher after a day of enrichment commenced in the classroom. The researcher's fellow first grade team teachers were interviewed after the course of the planned enrichment program. The students were interviewed informally throughout and after the course of the enrichment programs in the classroom. The purpose of the interviews and observations was to collect as much information as possible about the effects of enrichment on

the regular classroom setting with students who do not receive outside enrichment on a regular basis.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The data for this research was collected from the researcher's first grade classroom at Wright Charter School. The classroom is one of three first grades in the Title I school, which is set in a rural community in the southwest corner of Santa Rosa, California. As the researcher I felt that using my own classroom was of the best use to collect actual data, and see the effects of enrichment on actual students. The class consists of 11 girls and 9 boys, all between the ages of six and seven. There are 12 Hispanic students, seven Caucasian students, and one African American student.

The classroom is a large room, colorfully decorated with student work and references for student use. The students sit at large tables with five to six students per table and they also spend time on the carpet in a large group at various times throughout the day. The student's cubbies are placed near the front door and they leave their backpacks outside to make more room in the classroom. A class library is located across from the front door and students spend free time choosing books and reading by the library. There is a teacher table in the corner used for small group instruction both during the morning for reading groups and in the middle of the day for math groups. Technology can also be seen in the classroom in the form of a document camera and video projector at the front of the room, as well as a computer for student use by the library. A television and VCR are located in the corner of the classroom as well.

Typical Class Schedule

8:20-8:45- Bell Work- Morning activities center around a weekly theme. The students also begin each day with a timed addition or subtraction fact test.

8:45-9:50- Leveled Reading Groups- The students switch among the three first grade classes for differentiated, structured reading groups.

9:50-10:10- Recess

10:10-11:15- Math

11:15-11:45- Physical Education or Garden

11:45-12:30-Lunch

12:30-1:30- Leveled Writing Groups- The students again switch between the three first grade classes for differentiated, structured writing time. Depending on the weekly theme, student writing varies and this is a time for enrichment through writing.

1:30-2:30- Afternoon Activities- This changes also depending on the weekly theme. Activities include: library, science, social studies, art buddies, and activities with older buddy classes. This is time of day when the majority of enrichment activities occur.

Enrichment Activities- Nutrition Week

My action research took place during the first grade Nutrition Week. The purpose of this week was to expose the students to as many different types of healthy food options as possible, through reading, writing, cooking, taste tests, and nutritional activities. The following will describe the various enrichment activities that occurred during the week.

Monday

The students began the day with brainstorming a list of different foods they eat for breakfast. They then recorded what they had for breakfast on a record sheet and were told that they were going to do this every morning during Nutrition Week. The class had a discussion about healthy

breakfast foods versus non-healthy breakfast foods with a quick lesson on the type of energy different foods produce in our bodies. During reading groups the students read a book called “Fruit” with the teacher. With the instructional assistant, the students conducted a taste test of various types of fruit. They recorded this on a “Like/Don’t Like” record sheet. The next enrichment activity was in the afternoon during which the students made fruit smoothies with their teacher. They learned step-by-step how to make a smoothie and along each step was the opportunity for discussing the health benefit of the ingredients of the smoothie.

After making smoothies the students were introduced to the artwork of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, an artist who painted faces out of fruits and vegetables. The students brainstormed a list of different fruits and vegetables that could represent the various parts of a human face and were told that they were going to be creating their own face out of fruits and vegetables later in the week.

Tuesday

The morning bell work consisted of a fruit word sheet and the students recording their breakfast on the record sheet. During reading groups the students read a book called “Munch, Munch” with the teacher and this was followed by a mini-lesson on different snacks that people eat. With the instructional assistant the students made oatmeal in a Crockpot and then were able to eat it with toppings of their choice. In the afternoon the focus was on nuts and seeds. The teacher provided a focus lesson on nuts and seeds and the nutritional benefits and the students participated in a taste test of various types of nuts and seeds. They then graphed their favorite nut or seed on a class graph. After this the students created “Nutty Faces” by drawing faces with different silly parts made out of nuts.

Wednesday

The morning bell work today was a snack page on which the students had to decode different healthy snacks and a spaghetti plate maze on the back. Wednesday is a short day at Wright Charter School and benchmark exams for writing were given today so the bell work was the only enrichment provided on this day.

Thursday

The students began the day with bell work on which they recorded their morning breakfast and completed a vegetable word search. During reading groups with the teacher they read a story called “Shake Pudding.” After reading the story they made pudding with the teacher with nonfat milk and they did a brief lesson on dairy products. With the instructional assistant the students engaged in a vegetable tasting activity and recorded the vegetables they liked/didn’t like on their record sheet. In the afternoon the students wrote about food they would bring on a picnic after reading a story about a teddy bear picnic. Healthy options were discussed. After writing the students began their “Fruit and Vegetable” faces that they had begun discussing on Monday afternoon, as well as graphing their favorite vegetables from the morning.

Friday

Today’s activities were centered on the story “Stone Soup.” The students began the morning by recording their daily breakfast and then they completed a “Breakfast Quiz.” On this quiz they were given a variety of breakfast foods and they had to decide which foods were healthy, which were okay in moderation, and which were not good options for breakfast. During reading group time the students read “Stone Soup” with the teacher and with the instructional assistant they chopped vegetables to make stone soup. They discussed the steps in making the soup and added

water, seasoning, and a stone. For writing on this day the students wrote about the process of making stone soup. After this they were able to eat the stone soup they had made. For the rest of the afternoon they completed their fruit and vegetable face art projects.

Observations

Throughout the Nutrition Week in the first grade classroom I observed the students attitudes towards the enrichment activities during the bell work, reading groups, and in the afternoon. I was looking to observe the motivation levels of the students in the classroom as well as the amount of negative behaviors that occurred. My purpose of observing these two elements were to see if the students expressed more motivation during the enrichment activities than during the prescribed curriculum and whether or not the students would be more likely to engage in positive behaviors due to being excited about the activities because they were much more hands-on than activities during regular weeks.

In a regular school week the prescribed reading curriculum consists of reading leveled Scholastic reader books, practicing sight words, and fluency practice with the teacher. With the instructional assistant the students usually practice sight words, spelling words, and engage in lessons from the Signs for Sounds program. The activities during Nutrition Week were much more hands-on and involved food and activities that connected throughout the day and week. In terms of behavior the afternoons can be challenging for this particular class. There are several Attention-Deficit-Hyperactive-Disorder (ADHD) students in the class who have a hard time focusing on the curriculum in the afternoons and do not seem that engaged by it, depending on the activity. I had thought that because these activities were engaging and enriching that these students would exhibit less negative behaviors.

Throughout this enrichment week I saw a major increase in motivation in the students. Several students would come in before school started in the morning, curious what we would be doing during the day with nutrition, which does not regularly occur. The students also were more motivated during reading time than usual. I saw this through the comments they would make, such as “I love this book,” and “I can’t wait to make Stone Soup.” The normal reading curriculum does not lend itself to comments such as these during a regular week. I also found there to be high motivation with the students to discuss what we were learning at home and making home-to-school connections, which is not something that I usually see on a regular basis. A majority of the students were eager to discuss food they ate at home and returned to school telling me that they had asked their families if they could make smoothies, oatmeal, or Stone Soup at home. I do not regularly observe the students discussing the home-to-school connection on a regular basis.

In terms of behavior, I observed a minor increase in positive behaviors in the afternoon, as opposed to negative behaviors with the ADHD students. Overall, the activities related to food were more motivation for these students to display positive behaviors. However, the art activity was still difficult for two of them to focus on, as this did not involve any actual food. I found that the activities that involved the eating of food did promote an increase in positive behaviors with all of the ADHD students, and the class as a whole.

Interviews

I interviewed my fellow two colleagues, with whom I plan and teach classes. Both are first grade teachers and we planned the nutrition week together, as a team. Their students participated in the same activities that the students I taught and observed did. When I interviewed both of them about their students motivation levels during the Nutrition Week they both expressed that

they felt their students were more motivated and actively engaged in the curriculum as opposed to other theme weeks we have planned and taught. They both also saw an increase in positive behaviors with their ADHD students in the afternoons. “It was as if they wanted to try to focus more because they didn’t want to miss out on any of the food we were going to make or eat,” remarked one of my colleagues.

Aside from observing more motivation from the students in the classroom, my colleagues discussed how by planning the Nutrition Week with all of the enrichment activities, especially the hands-on food activities they were more excited by what we were doing, which in turn made the more students more excited. “I couldn’t wait to make the smoothies with them and share with them how I make a healthy snack and they could sense that. They were excited simply because I was,” said one of my colleagues. Both of my colleagues and I agreed that we felt our day and week had a much better flow to it when we were including enrichment activities during the morning reading time, instead of the regular reading curriculum. “The students didn’t feel as if they were waiting until the end of the day to do something fun, which I believe really increased their motivation,” said a colleague. “For most of these students, they don’t experience fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis in their homes. Many don’t have home cooked meals so they were very excited to learn about and enjoy all the activities we planned,” said a colleague.

Due to the fact that these students are in a Program Improvement, Title I school many are not used to healthy options and fresh foods, as stated by my colleague above. This could be a reason for the increased motivation and excitement with the students. I observed about 85% of them making remarks that showed how much they loved fruits and vegetables when we conducted our taste tests. Several students were not familiar with some of the fruits and

vegetables we were exposing them too, and 90% of them were willing to try them. Of these students the majority seemed to find new fruits and vegetables they liked.

When I asked the students in an informal way how they liked the activities we were doing during Nutrition Week compared to the activities from the previous week which was centered around weather, several said things such as, “I love this week, I love that we get to eat yummy food everyday!” Several expressed that they liked being able to cook the oatmeal and that they didn’t think they would like it but they did. The majority of students enjoyed the Stone Soup, coming back for seconds and thirds. When I asked them about the art project, with the fruit and vegetable faces that they created, they all appeared to be proud of including the fruits and vegetables they had learned about during the week on their art projects.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Overall, my observations during the enrichment week studying nutrition showed that enrichment in the regular classroom led to higher levels of motivation and excitement. By providing the students with hands-on activities and activities that connected together throughout the day and week the students appeared to be more excited about their learning. The break in the monotony of the prescribed curriculum during reading time really seemed to excite the students and create an increase in their motivation and behavior.

My interviews with my fellow colleagues further showed that enrichment in the regular classroom promotes an increase in motivation and interest in learning. All three of the first grade teachers who were involved in the teaching and planning of the nutrition week found that even students who do not perform in the top levels of the class were more interested in the activities and motivated to try their best. They also seemed to retain more of what they learned, on Friday, the last day of the week, the majority of students were able to recall the discussion from Monday morning lesson on healthy breakfast options. The interviews with my colleagues also validated that the students who normally have a difficult time focusing during the rote learning of reading and math were more engaged and able to focus during the enrichment activities, compared to weeks in which we are teaching the normal reading and math curriculum.

Not only did the enrichment curriculum in the first grade class promote higher levels of motivation, it also increased the students home-to-school connection, making them more eager to share what they were doing and learning at school at home with their families, and also bringing in experiences from their own homes into the classroom. This home-to-school connection is essential in helping students to strengthen their overall learning experiences.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

There are some limitations to the action research I conducted. One limitation is that the enrichment activities did not lend themselves to the curricular area of mathematics. While there was some graphing involved during the week, overall the regular math curriculum was taught to the students. It would be necessary to see how enrichment activities could expand within a week to the math curriculum to get a better view of enrichment in the regular classroom.

Another limitation to this study is that it did involve food which is a highly motivating factor for children. It is not known whether or not enrichment in another theme that does not involve food activities would be as motivating.

Another limitation to this study is that it took place in a first grade classroom, where there is not the pressure of giving the STAR test at the end of the year. There is more freedom to create enrichment activities within the first grade classroom. While testing does occur at the first grade level it is not at the level of state testing.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides several implications for future research. It is very evident that when activities are highly engaging and connect together students in Program Improvement schools are more motivated to learn and focus in the classroom. It would be necessary in the future to examine if this is true in other grades, besides a first grade classroom. Enrichment education should be provided within a grade that does take the STAR test at the end of the year. It would be interesting to examine the effects of a classroom that is provided with ample enrichment education compared to a classroom that is strictly “taught to the test” through the prescribed reading and math curriculum and examine the two classrooms results on the STAR test.

It would also be advisable to measure the student's growth over time with enrichment activities compared to regular classroom curriculum. This was only a glimpse into enrichment curriculum for a week, so it would be necessary to evaluate the longevity of enrichment over several months of research.

Overall Significance of the Study

Overall, this study emphasizes the great need for more hands-on, enrichment activities in the regular elementary school classroom. Many students, especially those in Program Improvement schools, do not have as many opportunities for extra-curricular enrichment activities. Schools that are only focusing on raising test scores by teaching reading and mathematical skills are missing valuable opportunities to enhance student's learning by providing enrichment in the regular classroom. The research conducted in this study shows that the enrichment activities can be planned and implemented without jeopardizing the skills that students need to be successful. Moreover, by providing students with enrichment activities, there are more opportunities to reach all students, even those who have a difficult time in the classroom, whether due to behavior or learning difficulties. All students should have to chance to participate in enrichment opportunities, not only those deemed "gifted and talented," in the regular classroom.

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