

THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATION ON THE CRITICAL THINKING
OF GIFTED READERS AND THE EVOLVING
PERSPECTIVE OF THE FIFTH GRADE CLASSROOM TEACHER

by

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B.A., Kansas State University, 1998

M.S., Kansas State University, 2001

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

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Abstract

With the inception of No Child Left Behind, educators are required to ensure proficiency for all students in reading and math, but provide no incentive for developing the talents of gifted students (Gentry, 2006b). Implementing differentiation into the classroom can assist educators in providing appropriate instruction for all students *and* maximizing the potential of gifted learners. Differentiation modifies curriculum and instruction to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and the fifth grade teacher's perceptions of differentiation as it was implemented into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. This qualitative research study was conducted in a fifth grade classroom in a rural mid-western community from October 24, 2008 to February 4, 2009. Data collection included response journals of the gifted readers, audio recordings of literature circle discussions, observations/field notes, digital voice recording of interviews with the gifted readers and the classroom teacher, teacher reflective journal, and weekly meetings.

Data analysis revealed three levels of critical thinking within ten categories as outlined in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Advanced Level Critical Thinking included the categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. Intermediate Level Critical Thinking was evidenced by the categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction. Basic Level Critical Thinking was represented by responses in the Ambiguity and Engagement categories. The *Oral Response Hierarchy of*

Literature Circle Critical Thinking revealed four critical thinking levels of oral response. Analytical and Probe represented Advanced Level Critical Thinking, Conjecture demonstrated Intermediate Level Critical Thinking, and Engagement provided evidence of Basic Level Critical Thinking. Advanced Level Critical Thinking was evidenced in both written and oral responses across the three stages of the study.

Data analysis further revealed the teacher's perceptions of differentiated instruction. Benefits included increase in students' motivation, active involvement and leadership, exceeding expectations, quality of literature circle discussions, confidence in implementing differentiation with continuous support of a mentor, flexibility, and empowerment to solve problems.

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Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my granddaughter, Jacey A. Williams. Throughout her four short years of life she has overcome many obstacles and has taught me what it truly means to persevere. I want her to know that with hard work she can attain any goals that she sets.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1998 I began my teaching career in gifted education. I was naïve in my thinking about my role as a gifted facilitator. I had great expectations of what I thought my job would entail and I was sure I was the key to helping every one of my gifted students achieve to his/her full potential. It was only a matter of days before the reality of the job became disappointingly clear. As a gifted facilitator in rural Kansas I was traveling to a number of schools in a number of towns in a single day. Pullout services were the extent of what I could provide, and due to time constraints, scheduled my identified gifted students once a week for 45 minutes. I remember thinking, “So these students are only gifted 45 minutes once a week! What happens to them the rest of the week?” Thus began my personal search for what I could do to increase the rigor in the academic life of my gifted students.

In my quest, I tried several options. I started math enrichment groups for high ability math students to receive an extra 30 minutes of time each week. The intent of this enrichment was to provide learning experiences for students to be challenged with math problems requiring multi-step problem solving. Next, I offered reading enrichment for 30 minutes once a week to high ability readers by providing novels that inspired them to think, write, and discuss what they had read. However, frustration was still high because in addition to the work I was asking the students to do, they were still required to do the majority of math and reading assignments assigned to them in the regular classroom.

Then I discovered a book that inspired me to rethink how I could improve services to the gifted students -- *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999). I was inspired about what I was reading

and thought this approach would be a way to collaborate with the regular education teachers and provide learning experiences that would benefit the students. The students would be engaged in challenging activities in the classroom every day and I was more than willing to collaborate with teachers in providing materials that would match the objectives toward which they were striving. I wish I could say there was a happy ending to this story, but unfortunately this was not the reality. Busy schedules, the pressures of mandated state testing, and a lack of understanding by teachers toward this philosophy of teaching took its toll.

Over the last ten years I have worked with a number of teachers at various grade levels from kindergarten through 8th grade in a number of school districts. Each year I had great hope that this would be the year I could convince one or two teachers to take my offer seriously in working together to set up a differentiated curriculum in at least one subject area. There have been limited successes along the way and I have felt encouraged by several teachers who are beginning to understand the need to change instruction in their classroom in order to meet the needs of gifted students and are beginning to ask for ideas. Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, and Zhang (1993) found if the appropriately challenging curriculum is left to the regular classroom teacher, little change will be made to the curriculum due to the multitude of responsibilities the classroom teacher faces, the lack of training in gifted education, and in some cases even a lack of motivation to provide a differentiated curriculum.

Although Goodlad's (1984/2004) study concerning classroom practices did not specifically address the issue of gifted students and their needs, he did believe that students were not being adequately engaged with their learning experiences in the regular

classroom. Although Goodlad did not target gifted students, he found instruction in the regular classrooms was instruction that did not engage students or provide adequate challenge. In 1993, a report published by the U.S. Department of Education, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*, reported, “. . . American students perform poorly on international tests, are offered a less rigorous curriculum, read fewer demanding books, do less homework, and enter the work force or postsecondary education less well prepared” (p. 1). The report further revealed that while there are some effective programs for gifted students, they are limited and the majority of gifted students spend their time in the regular classroom where little differentiation takes place.

Thus began my mission to locate a regular classroom teacher who would be willing to modify his/her philosophy of teaching and open up his/her classroom to provide a differentiated curriculum for the students. When I state, “modify his/her philosophy of teaching,” I have come to understand that when a teacher truly embraces differentiation, he/she must be willing to lose some control of how teachers normally teach in the classroom. The teacher must be willing to allow students the opportunity to take a more proactive stand in their education, but at the same time be guided by the teacher. Both the teacher's role and type of instruction change from whole-class instruction to one in which students are grouped according to interests and developmental levels while the teacher becomes a facilitator in the students' learning.

In this qualitative case study, I endeavored to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also

documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. This study may provide the impetus other regular education teachers need to undertake the challenge of differentiating the reading program in their classroom.

Overview of the Issues

If schools do their business correctly, all students should be active, engaged learners. The question then becomes, "What is the business of schools?" Schlechty (1997) responds, "The business of schools is to design, create, and invent high-quality, intellectually demanding work for students: schoolwork that calls on students to think, to reason, and to use their minds well and that calls on them to engage ideas, facts, and understandings whose perpetuation is essential to the survival of the common culture and relevant to the particular culture, group and milieu from which students come and in which they are likely to function" (pp. 49-50).

The business of school then becomes assigning work that engages students, compels students to persist when they experience difficulty, and challenges the students to such a degree that when the work is completed every student has a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Schlechty (1997) goes on to define quality knowledge work:

1. It is intellectual activity associated with the production of a product or performance that is sufficiently attractive to the students for whom it is intended to engage them without coercion.

2. It is sufficiently attractive and compelling to ensure that, once students are engaged, they persist with the work until the intended product meets the required standards.
3. It is sufficiently challenging to ensure that students experience a sense of delight and accomplishment as they complete the task.
4. It results in the students learning what teachers and the students themselves intend that they should learn.
5. It results in the students learning things that are judged by parents, other adult members of the community, and the society at large as being of social and cultural value. (pp. 58-59)

When contemplating what the business of school really is, it seems like an almost impossible task to accomplish, especially with the diverse range of abilities in today's heterogeneous classrooms. What is appropriate and challenging for one student will not be appropriate and challenging for the next. Subban (2006) states that classroom teachers have not adjusted their teaching methods from the homogeneity of past years to the wide diversity that is prevalent in today's classrooms.

Most school districts have a mission statement with wording similar to the following: "All students, including those who are exceptional, are entitled to a public-supported education in which instruction is geared to their needs, interests, and developmental levels" (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992, p. 3). It would seem, however, that the students who are at the greatest risk of not learning something new each day are the high ability or gifted learners. Winebrenner (2000) argues, "Either we must explain to parents that the promise of the school's mission statement does not apply to high

ability students, or we must commit ourselves to providing these students with appropriate and differentiated learning experiences” (p. 54). The reality is that even though some type of gifted services may be provided to some gifted students, the majority of their time is spent in the regular classroom. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to provide the educational development for all students (Mulhern, 2003).

If educators truly want to meet the needs of a diverse classroom of learners, they must examine their teaching beliefs and look for effective ways to challenge all students. Incorporating differentiation into the regular classroom will help them accomplish this goal. Wormeli (2007) believes that through the use of differentiation, teachers can raise the achievement level of all students, but requires the attention of all educators for this to happen. In a differentiated classroom, gifted students are not given more of the same work, but they are given work that challenges them. Gifted students are entitled to the same quality of instruction as other students in a classroom. Differentiation is modifying curriculum and instruction in order to meet the diverse needs of students (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003).

Ruf (2005) states, “Because children differ so greatly in their abilities, it makes sense that educational programs would allow for the diversity of learning styles and speed” (p. 26). Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, with the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), it appears the gifted student is increasingly becoming the child who is left behind. With so much emphasis placed on raising test scores, “NCLB has created an environment in which school

administrators have no incentive to concentrate on educating gifted children or developing talents of any children” (Gentry, 2006b, p. 24).

The climate of today’s classrooms is one in which teachers are so concerned about teaching all the “facts” the students need to do well on high stakes testing, that they have little time left over to worry about the students who already know the information. If drill and practice is what is needed to ensure that all students meet the minimum required standards, then revisiting a concept again won’t hurt the gifted student. Moon, Brighton, & Callahan (2003) report:

Across settings, teachers readily acknowledge that gifted students are not adequately challenged, already know much of the material covered in class, and need enrichment opportunities. However, teachers hesitate to provide these things for fear of wasting time. Despite these realizations, teachers still feel pressure to emphasize test preparation to assure that the gifted students do what they can do to “pull up” the rest of the student population. (p. 56)

Mendoza (2006) asked classroom teachers to estimate how much time and energy they spent teaching the subject matter that was tested on state assessments. The responses were averaged and present an alarming statistic--students who score unsatisfactory receive 24% of instructional time, partially proficient students receive 39%, proficient students receive 26%, and advanced students receive only 11% of teaching time. In light of these statistics, one wonders what the gifted students are doing for the other 89% of the time.

Mendoza (2006) addressed the issue of what effects the teachers were experiencing as a result of No Child Left Behind. One teacher was quoted as saying, “It seems that differentiation of instruction and ‘preparing children’ for the state examinations are directly opposed to one another since Colorado Student Assessment Programs do not allow for any diverse or creative thinking, but rather for one type of answer” (p. 29). Another teacher voiced concern that, “regular classroom teachers...are often quite keen on collaborating to differentiate instruction. However, movement (to higher test scores) of underperforming students takes precedence. Basic differentiation happens, but I (the respondent) question if it adequately meets the needs of gifted students as evidenced by their stagnated growth on state and district assessments” (p. 29).

It is interesting to note that in this same study, Mendoza (2006) asked teachers what they would tell Congress about No Child Left Behind and gifted students. Excerpts from several of their responses include:

Three million gifted and talented students are currently our nation’s most under served and under funded human resource. Programs across the country that provide qualitatively different educational needs for these students are evaporating like water in a desert...

Face it—these gifted students are our future leaders, and if we don’t start giving them at least equal time and meet their needs, we will be in a sad state...

...Create classrooms that give all children the chance to excel in some area.

Gifted children are the future thinkers and innovators of our country. If we continue to ignore this population in the schools, we will soon be outsourcing all jobs except menial ones from this country! (pp. 29-30)

The voices of these teachers are not encouraging. They realize what is happening to education, and especially the education of the gifted. In their hearts, they know the teaching methods they are using are not beneficial to students, but feel helpless to change. Gentry (2006a) argues “No Child Left Behind (2001) is, in effect, creating a climate of controlled learning and sending a message to administrators, teachers, students, and parents that the school’s job involves teaching to the standards—nothing more and nothing less. When students meet the standards, the schools have met their obligation to ‘educate’” (p. 73).

Gentry (2006a) outlines four effects that are a result of an emphasis on testing and accountability from No Child Left Behind:

1. *Focus on only what is tested.* When schools narrow the focus of their curriculum to what is being tested, the curriculum becomes a series of unchallenging exercises for the students. Teachers disregard enrichment activities and prohibit students who have already mastered the material to move on. Teachers’ use of repetitive testing exercises does little to challenge the gifted student. When the target of a school’s curriculum is only material that will be covered on the state assessment tests, the school year becomes a series of unchallenging and uninspiring activities. When high stakes tests are used to measure adequate yearly progress, these scores cannot adequately reflect authentic student learning. Detrimental effects from this type of education include decreased graduation rates, increased dropout rates, lower scores on nationally and internationally comparative tests of learning, and increased student expulsion and retention.

2. *Deficit-based approach to education.* A curriculum that teaches to students' deficits instead of their strengths is detrimental to student's motivation. How do you keep students motivated and inspired to work if the only things worked on are areas of deficiency? In order to improve self-efficacy in students, they need the opportunity to develop their areas of talent and interest. An environment that embraces students' strengths and interests is one in which student achievement will flourish. With the emphasis of No Child Left Behind on proficiency, it has eliminated excellence in our schools and clearly leaves the gifted student unchallenged. Not only is the gifted child required to complete the drill and practice necessary for other students, but they are also finding that gifted services are being cut due to budget restraints. School districts are reallocating the funds once used for gifted students and targeting them to programs that improve test scores. This practice is a double strike against gifted students.
3. *Standards—the same for all and the erosion of challenge.* A damaging assumption imposed by No Child Left Behind is that all students can attain the same high standards. If that is possible, then those standards are too low. Students are individuals who come to school with a wide range of differences. This one-size fits all mentality does not account for variables that are beyond the control of school districts. Schools cannot control variables such as environmental experiences, aptitude, school readiness, or home environment. When we expect all students to become proficient in same grade-level standards, we fail to take into consideration the individual differences of

students. In this type of environment, gifted students are at risk of underachievement in terms of their potential. When we undereducate and underdevelop the gifted student, they “do not learn to struggle, to persevere, to work hard, and to attribute their success to hard work” (Gentry, 2006a, p. 76).

4. *Cheating and the message to students.* Due to pressure put on educators and students themselves to perform well, instances of cheating have been reported. The message that is indirectly sent to students is that it is okay to do whatever is necessary in order to achieve the goal. This lack of integrity by educators who should be modeling honesty and ethical standards is detrimental to students. Gifted students especially are sensitive to issues of fairness and many of these students have a hard time coping with the type of action that is being taken by educators. This type of behavior is unacceptable and realistically calls into question whether or not high stakes testing is an accurate measure of school learning.

The impact of No Child Left Behind is having wide range ramifications: loss of recess time, and art and music programs being shortened or eliminated (Henley, McBride, Milligan, Nichols, 2007); teaching to the middle students and not worrying about the bottom or top quartile of students; and teachers leaving the teaching profession within the first five years of teaching (Gentry, 2006a).

While No Child Left Behind seems to be having adverse effects on education as a whole, Gentry (2006b) outlines seven effects that it has had specifically on gifted students and their education:

1. Remedial, deficit focus designed to increase proficiency of low-achieving students.
2. Teaching what is tested.
3. Delivering a more standard, one-size-fits-all education to increasingly diverse students with differing needs, regardless of their individual needs.
4. Increased numbers of dropouts, pushed outs, and left outs.
5. Teachers afraid to teach, administrators afraid to let them.
6. Cheating, lying, and fuzzy math become common means of reporting school data.
7. Public education is undercut by un-substantiated alternatives.

Key findings from the first two of five research studies of a multifaceted research investigation into the effects of No Child Left Behind on high ability students shows several alarming statistics. The bottom ten percent of students made rapid gains from 2000 to 2007 in 4th grade math and reading and 8th grade math. However, performance of the top ten percent of students for this same period of time was judged to be “languid.” This pattern of larger gains for the lower achievers versus the smaller gains for high achievers was associated with the accountability system in general, and not just the result of the No Child Left Behind Act. Sixty percent of teachers reported that their top priority was the struggling student, and eighty-one percent of teachers reported that they gave more attention to the low-achieving student than the high-achieving student. Although teachers reported that they spent more time with the struggling student, eighty-six percent of these teachers felt there should be an equal focus given to all students. The study also reported that low-income, black, and Hispanic high achievers were being taught by

teachers with more experience or teachers who had a major or minor in math (Farkas & Duffett, 2008; Loveless, 2008).

In order to counteract these detrimental effects, efforts must be made to improve the quality of education for gifted students. Educators must revisit and reconsider what the federal government deemed appropriate for educating gifted students. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement released *National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent*. This report discussed the “quiet crisis” that prevailed in educating the top students and outlined steps that must be taken in order to achieve the goal of meeting the educational needs of the gifted student. Some of the steps they encouraged schools to implement included setting challenging curriculum standards for the school district, providing more challenging opportunities for gifted students, increasing the access to early education, increasing the learning opportunities for disadvantaged and minority children who displayed outstanding talents, and broadening the definition of gifted.

In light of these recommendations it would seem that educators would take the initiative to incorporate these practices into everyday teaching. Moon, Brighton, and Callahan (2003) report that when students have a steady diet of worksheets, skill drills, and continuous repetition, they are not receiving effective instruction. These types of practices are not in the best interest of any student, but especially the gifted student. Unfortunately, this type of practice is being seen consistently throughout classrooms across the country. Even though best practices do not support this type of education, it seems that teachers believe they have no choice because of the intense pressure to do well

on state tests. Once again, educators settle for mediocrity instead of providing the rich and stimulating experiences students need in order to develop and reach their potential.

It is time for educators to take a serious look at how No Child Left Behind is impacting student achievement. Walberg and Paik (2005) would argue that classroom teachers must set specific challenging goals for all students as these types of goals will lead to a higher achievement level for students. They further believe, “Goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development. Goal setting is most likely to improve task performance when the goals are specific and sufficiently challenging...” (p. 396). In light of this, educators must ask themselves whether they are content with proficiency for students or do they believe that education should push students to achieve their full potential. If educators were honest with themselves, they would admit that helping students achieve their highest potential and developing life-long learners is really the goal of education.

If we truly want to meet the needs of all students, teachers must scrutinize the teaching practices they are using and determine how they can begin the practice of differentiation. It is only through differentiation that appropriate challenge can be ensured for all students. Tomlinson (2000) argues that the use of differentiation can in fact be an integral part of standards-based instruction in today’s classrooms. In this time of standards-based instruction, teachers must use the standards, which align with the curriculum, to outline what they teach and then use differentiation to teach the same standard to the diversity of learners in their classroom. This can be accomplished by using a variety of teaching and learning methods such as incorporating varied levels of

materials, multiple instructional groups, and varying degrees of scaffolding (Tomlinson, 2000).

The conundrum of teaching the standards to a diverse classroom of learners while providing appropriate challenges is daunting. However, given adequate resources, support, and time, teachers can provide an appropriately enriched curriculum for all students. Using the school's curriculum as the backbone and then applying effective differentiation practices, the goal of challenging all students to their potential can be achieved.

Statement of the Problem

The reality is that the classrooms of today are filled with a group of students possessing a wide range of knowledge, interests, and educational needs. The teacher has been given the task of educating this heterogeneous group of students and at the same time ensuring that all students reach a level of proficiency designated by the state under the No Child Left Behind Act. This may seem like an insurmountable task, but with appropriate planning, adequate support, and resources this task can become a reality. McTighe and Brown (2005) propose, “. . . standards-based education and differentiated instruction not only can coexist, but must function together as two sides of the same accountability coin” (p. 235).

George (2005) believes that one of the ways schools can adequately educate and provide appropriate challenge for all students is through the development and implementation of differentiated curriculum, instruction, and assessment. When this type of practice is put into place all students can achieve their highest potential. In this type of

classroom the student, along with the teacher are both responsible for student academic growth and extending his/her educational limits.

Tomlinson (2003) defines differentiated instruction as “responsive instruction.” This type of instruction happens “as teachers become increasingly proficient in understanding their students as individuals, increasingly comfortable with the meaning and structure of the disciplines they teach, and increasingly expert at teaching flexibly in order to match instruction to student need with the goal of maximizing the potential of each learner in a given area” (pp. 2-3). The pathway to a differentiated classroom is not an easy one. There will be many twists and turns along the way as the teacher struggles with the realities of school, plus the added pressure of planning and implementing a differentiated classroom.

Much has been written about differentiation and its benefits in meeting the needs of all students (Page, 2000; Schneider, 2000; Tomlinson, 2005b). However, research studies have shown that little differentiation is actually taking place in the classroom (Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, & Zhang, 1993; Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards, Jacobs, Eckert, & Renzulli, 2004). Add to this the impact of No Child Left Behind and state mandated testing, and the reality is that many gifted students are not receiving the challenges they need to reach their academic potential. Research is needed to show how differentiation impacts the incentive for gifted students to increase their critical thinking and problem solving abilities when they are presented with challenging material. This study in particular focuses on gifted readers and how differentiation influences their way of thinking about literature and whether the added

challenge gives the gifted readers the ability to think more critically about the text and delve deeper into the reading experience.

Purpose of the Study

Working with gifted students has become a passion of mine over the past ten years. Due to the circumstances of the job, the reality is that pullout services for these students are all that can be offered. The short period of time available to work with the students each week is inappropriate. These students must have access to challenging experiences on a daily basis where they must work hard to solve problems, where they are actually required to study in order to understand the new concept, and where they experience the same struggles other students feel as they wrestle with new information. The only way this can happen is for differentiation to occur in the regular classroom.

This passion led to the purpose of this study, which was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. This study may provide the impetus regular education teachers need to undertake the challenge of differentiating the reading program in their classroom.

The research shows that in order for students to reach their full potential, an appropriately challenging curriculum is needed for all students (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). The reality of the classroom is that students have academic skills as diverse as one to two years below grade level up to several years above actual grade level. Teachers

also have a set of standards they are required to teach. In order to meet all these obligations, the classroom teacher must determine instructional methods to teach to this diversity and still maintain the necessary requirements. The one-size-fits-all mentality of teaching is not the most effective. Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards, Jacobs, Eckert, and Renzulli (2004) purport, “Talented readers’ abilities in reading will not develop if they are never asked to work to their full potential. Talented readers are left to develop and succeed on their own, as they need instructional support and curricular challenge that is different from strategies used with struggling students” (p. 315). It is imperative that teachers provide a differentiated reading program to gifted students so that they can continue their academic growth and maintain their desire to learn (Dooley, 1993).

This qualitative research study was conducted as an intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) uses the term “intrinsic” to describe a case study in which the researcher’s main goal is to gain a better understanding of a particular case. Through the use of interviews, participant observations, and reader response to high quality literature (including both journal responses and the use of literature circles), thick, rich descriptions convey the development of critical thinking and their ability to delve deeper into the reading experience as the teacher implemented a differentiated reading approach in the regular classroom.

Research Questions

Several research questions provide the framework for this study. The main impetus for conducting this research is how differentiation influenced the gifted readers’ ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reader experience as they

responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. The overall question guiding this study is:

How do gifted readers and a fifth grade classroom teacher respond to the implementation of a differentiated reading program?

The following questions will guide the research and data analysis for this study:

1. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking of gifted readers through their written response in response journals?
2. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking expressed by gifted readers in literature circle discussions?
3. In what ways does a differentiated reading program affect gifted readers?
4. How does a fifth grade classroom teacher's beliefs about differentiation change as she increases her knowledge and begins planning, implementing, and reacting to differentiated instruction in the reading program?
5. What impact does the fifth grade classroom teacher observe on the students in her classroom as a result of a differentiated reading program?

Significance of the Study

Much has been written about differentiation in the regular classroom (George, 2005; Roberts & Inman, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). Numerous articles and books have been written outlining the reasons why differentiation is beneficial for students, and especially gifted students because it provides the necessary challenge for all students to develop to their potential (Tomlinson, 2005b; Van Tassel-Baska and

Stambaugh, 2005). Linn-Cohen and Hertzog (2007) wrote that while there have been many books and articles written about differentiation and best practices to be used for gifted students in the regular education setting, there seems to be a lack of empirical research that describes the implementation of differentiation and the impact it has on gifted learners. “In-depth, qualitative studies are needed to illustrate classroom practices targeted to meet the needs of identified gifted and talented students” (p. 232). Several studies have been conducted which document the fact that little differentiation is actually taking place. Westberg, Archambault, Dobyms, and Salvin (1993) reported little differentiation was actually taking place for gifted students in 46 third and fourth grade classrooms across five subject areas. Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan (2005) reported that hindrances to differentiation included:

1. Changing teachers’ beliefs and practices requires an informed, supportive educational community.
2. Teachers in the midst of changing beliefs and practices require consistent coaching and honest, informed feedback about their efforts.
3. Changing teachers’ beliefs and practices require substantial time.
4. Implementing differentiation benefits from a healthy school environment.
5. Changing teachers’ beliefs and practices requires individual and peer reflection.
6. The most significant changes to teachers’ beliefs and practices occur when teachers are intrinsically motivated to make these changes.
7. Staff development and coaching efforts should focus on ways of encouraging teachers to utilize pre-existing organizational structures and resources to begin the process of creating a responsive classroom environment.

8. Teachers in the process of changing their beliefs and practices need differentiated coaching.
9. When addressing academic diversity, teachers must recognize students' varied readiness needs.
10. Changing beliefs and practices requires teachers to confront their prior assumptions about teaching and learning.
11. Teachers need support as they attempt to address diverse student needs in a culture of accountability. (pp. xiii-xiv)

More importantly, in a study dealing specifically with reading instruction for gifted students, Reis, et al (2004) reported that only three out of 12 classrooms reported any type of differentiation was being implemented in the reading classroom, and the differentiation that was reported was minimal and inconsistently used. By working with a fifth grade classroom teacher to implement differentiation in the reading classroom, this study may fill a void in the research that documents how gifted students' way of thinking and their ability to delve deeper into the reading experience is impacted.

In this study, several obstacles that were mentioned as roadblocks for teachers' use of differentiation in the classroom were removed. The classroom teacher in this study may be intrinsically motivated to make changes as per her willingness to be part of this study. She had access to consistent coaching and feedback from the researcher/mentor, support from the administrators, opportunity for reflection, and a potentially increased awareness of students' levels of readiness. The information gleaned from the classroom teachers' narrative may be helpful for other teachers attempting to implement differentiation in their classrooms.

The study may also provide an impetus for other gifted facilitators to work closely with classroom teachers who understand the need to differentiate, but need a mentor to travel along side him/her on this journey. Discussing issues and problems with a colleague may be a key component to becoming successful in a new endeavor, and the close working relationship between the classroom teacher and the researcher/mentor may provide this opportunity.

The study may also illustrate that when presented with challenging literature and the strategies that are necessary for students to delve deeper into understanding that literature, students rise to the occasion by providing more critical responses and the use of higher level thinking skills. Students were given the opportunity to read quality literature based on their gifted reading ability. They had the opportunity to apply critical thinking skills and initiate deeper comprehension as they reflected on their readings through response journal writing and literature discussions.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are several limitations and delimitations noted in this qualitative study. One limitation of this study is the researcher's role. As an avid advocate for differentiation, it is inherent that I do not focus on successes and overlook failures where they may not exist in this study. The classroom teacher was primarily responsible for providing instruction in the classroom. My role as participant observer/mentor was to facilitate and offer support, particularly to the gifted readers. Weekly meetings and a reflective journal by the classroom teacher provided an appropriate perspective of the study and how it may have affected her beliefs about differentiation for all readers.

One of the delimitations in this case study involved five gifted learners in a fifth grade classroom. The data collection and analysis focus only on the gifted readers and the teacher's differentiated reading curriculum in this classroom. The setting for this research study is a rural school with limited racial and/or ethnic diversity. This study may help lead to an understanding of students' interaction with appropriately leveled literature and the written and oral responses in reaction to the readings. However, the report may contain sufficient detail to allow the reader to apply the findings.

A second delimitation to this study involves student choice when selecting literature. Although a key component of differentiation is student interest (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003), the decision as to which literature would be implemented with the students during the course of this study was a collaborative effort between the teacher and researcher. Hartley (1996) contends that if literature selection is left entirely up to the students, they may not choose literature that will develop and apply advanced reading skills. The selection of literature was based on appropriate reading level for gifted readers based on the curriculum already in place.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for clarity in the context of this dissertation study.

- 1. Content:** The information a teacher wants students to learn and the materials or a mechanism through which that is accomplished (Tomlinson, 1999).
- 2. Critical thinking:** The student's ability to analyze and evaluate information sources, meaningfully question their origin and purpose, and look at alternative perspectives (McLaghlin & DeVogd, 2004).

3. **Deeper comprehension:** The ability of readers to dig below the surface and understand the nuances of the text by evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing (Gallagher, 2004).
4. **Differentiated curriculum:** Content that is based on standards but requires the student to think at deeper levels than other students (Tomlinson, 2005b).
5. **Differentiated instruction:** Instruction that is responsive to student readiness. The goal is to maximize the capabilities of all students in understanding the necessary skills and to experience growth (Cox, 2008).
6. **Differentiated reading program:** The term used to describe the differentiation of instruction, content, and products in the reading classroom.
7. **Differentiation:** A modification in curriculum and instruction that is necessary to support students with academically diverse learning needs. This includes adaptations to the content, process, product, and learning environment (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003).
8. **Diverse learners:** Students in a classroom with a wide range of experiences and background knowledge that make them individuals (Tomlinson, 1999).
9. **Gifted readers:** Avid, enthusiastic, voracious readers who are able to use reading for different purposes (Kaplan, 1999).
10. **Learning profiles:** The ways in which students learn best (Tomlinson, 1999).
11. **Literature circles:** A focused discussion on characters and events, personal experiences that relate to the text, and observations of the writer's craft. Other names include book talks or book discussions. For purposes of this

study, literature circles will be used (Day, Spiegel, McLellan, & Brown, 2002).

- 12. Literature response journals:** A repository of wanderings, wonderings, speculations, questions, and explorative thoughts recorded during the reading process (Hancock, 1993).
- 13. Process:** The activities that are designed to ensure that students use key skills to make sense out of essential ideas and information (Tomlinson, 1999).
- 14. Products:** The vehicles through which students demonstrate and extend what they have learned (Tomlinson, 1999).
- 15. Student interest:** A child's affinity, curiosity, or passion for a particular topic or skill (Tomlinson, 1999).
- 16. Student readiness:** The student's entry point relative to a particular understanding or skills (Tomlinson, 1999).

Organization of the Study

Chapter One introduces this proposed study, how differentiation influenced the gifted reader's ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions. This study also documents a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. This chapter includes an overview of the issues, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter Two provides the theoretical perspectives that serve as the framework for the study. Constructivism, social

constructivism, and transactional theory of reader response will provide the underpinnings for the present study. Also included in Chapter Two is research related to differentiation and its response to student readiness, interest, learning profiles, and effectiveness for gifted students; understanding giftedness and the special needs associated with that giftedness; effective literacy instruction; the use of reader response in a reading classroom, and research studies outlining the lack of differentiation being implemented in regular classrooms across the country. Chapter Three describes the proposed methodology, which includes a description of the research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter Four provides the results of the study. Chapter Five examines the findings of the study and conclusions that were drawn. The implications as they relate to classroom teachers, educators, gifted facilitators, and policymakers will be discussed and recommendations for future research studies will be offered.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature discusses the theoretical perspectives and research studies that provide the basis of this study. The research focused on how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience by documenting the development of critical thinking through the use of a differentiated reading program with fifth grade gifted readers. The first section presents the theoretical perspectives, including the constructivist theory, the social constructivist theory, and the transactional theory of reader response. The constructivist theory (Fosnot, 1996) purports that students are continually building knowledge based on prior experiences. In addition, students need the social interaction of teachers and peers to discuss and make sense of new information so they can continue to build on their prior knowledge. This building of knowledge through interaction with others is the basis of the social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on the transactional theory of reader response, the transaction between the reader and the text is necessary for students to construct meaning and acquire new knowledge (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The second section presents research on differentiation including a rationale for its importance in the regular classroom. In order to have a clearer understanding of gifted students, definitions and characteristics of gifted students and gifted readers will be outlined, as well as research that leads to understanding the challenges that are necessary for a gifted reader to continue building on his/her knowledge. Effective literacy practices for reading classrooms and the important role reader response plays in the reading classroom will be discussed. Studies indicate that even though differentiation is an effective practice to be used with gifted students, the majority of classrooms are not

utilizing this practice (Westberg, Archambault, Dobyms, & Salvin, 1993). This study will attempt to fill a gap in research dealing with differentiation for gifted readers in the regular classroom setting.

Theoretical Perspectives

The three theories that serve as the anchor for this study are constructivism, social constructivism, and transactional theory of reader response. Each of these theories has an underlying belief that knowledge is continually being built on what is already known. The social aspect of constructing knowledge is a key component to the social constructivist theory. The transactional theory of reader response proposes that past experiences are part of the foundation for making meaning from the text that is read.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is a theory of cognitive development wherein the main proposition proposes:

learning means constructing, creating, inventing, and developing our own knowledge Because none of us has had exactly the same experiences as any other person, our understandings, our interpretations, our schemata (knowledge constructs, learning) of any concept cannot be exactly the same as anyone else's. (Marlowe & Page, 1998, p. 10)

Fosnot (1996) defines constructivism as a theory about knowledge and learning; it describes both what "knowing" is and how one "comes to know." This theory describes knowledge as temporary, developmental, nonobjective, internally constructed, and socially and culturally mediated. Learning is viewed as a self-regulatory process of

struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate.

“A constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models, concepts, and strategies” (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix). Students learn to make meaning and build on their knowledge when they are allowed to explore areas on their own, with guidance from the teacher. The students will attain a much deeper understanding when they make the connections between what they know and the new concepts that are being presented.

When looking at knowledge acquisition through a constructivist lens, learners are not passive, but require active involvement in the process of learning since critical thinking is required instead of memorization (Marlowe & Page, 1998; Queen, 1999). This active participation in meaningful learning evolves out of relevant teaching to individual learners and their needs (Queen, 1999).

According to Cambourne (2002), constructivism consists of three propositions about the learning process: (1) What is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned; (2) The purposes or goals that the learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learned; and (3) Knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through the processes of negotiation, evaluation, and transformation.

In order for students to develop into lifelong critical readers, they must be given the opportunity to critique and construct meaning from text based on their own personal

lived experiences. Quality literacy teaching does not impose a stringent singular interpretation of text, but asks students to become actively involved in the learning process. Teachers who want their students to develop to their full potential must foster relationships with students that are built on respect, meaningful experiences, cooperative learning, and an environment that encourages students to take risks in their learning.

Social Constructivist Theory

The social constructivist theory expands on the constructivist theory by adding the social aspect of learning. Vygotsky (1978) recognized a difference between what a student could learn independently and what the student could learn when working in a social context. His theory concerning the zone of proximal development is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Learning is not done in isolation, but in tangent with others.

Vygotsky (1978) believes that a child begins learning before he/she ever commences formal education in school. This pre-school learning is markedly different than the learning that occurs in school. However, the learning that a child encounters in school will have its origin in what was learned prior to formal schooling.

Vygotsky (1978, 1986) proposes two different levels of learning and states that learning should complement the child’s developmental level. The first is the *actual developmental level* of a child. This level, known as the child’s *mental age*, can be determined by giving the child a variety of tests to determine the actual developmental level. This level of development is referred to as their *mental age level* or, in other

words, represents what the child can do independently. However, Vygotsky does not stop at this point. He then goes on to provide some assistance to the child in solving a problem, either by demonstrating a solution, initiating a solution, or asking leading questions. This becomes known as the child's level of potential development as determined through problem solving under an adult's guidance or collaborating with more capable peers. Vygotsky refers to this second level as the *zone of proximal development*. This zone of proximal development constantly changes in a student. What is known as the child's zone of proximal development today will become the child's actual developmental level in the future.

Vygotsky (1978) further believes, “. . . learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child's overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process. Thus, the notion of a zone of proximal development enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (p. 89). Vygotsky further explains that as students learn they are in fact stimulating different internal developmental processes that only function when an interaction is taking place between the student and his/her peers or with other people in the surroundings. When these processes become fully integrated into a student, they are considered to be part of that student's independent developmental level.

Using the Vygotskian perspective, Forman and Cazden (2004) determined that when children work together in collaborative tasks requiring data generation, planning, and management, they are using their speech to guide the actions of their partner, and in

turn, they are guided by their partner's speech. When students are exposed to this type of social collaboration, they are able to master difficult problems that they would be unable to solve on their own.

Social constructivists believe that learning is constructed through interactions with others and takes place within a socio-cultural context. Oldfather and Dahl (1994) report that as learners take in new information, they learn from and with others. This process involves teaching and learning between peers, and includes quiet exchanges of information, pooling of ideas, and vicarious learning as children watch and learn from each other.

A social constructivist perspective focuses on learning as sense making rather than on the acquisition of rote knowledge that "exists" somewhere outside the learner (Oldfather, West, White, & Wilmarth, 1999). Students will remember more and retain knowledge longer if they are able to connect new information with what they have previously learned. Students construct meaning of text as they interact with other students, teachers, texts, and media (Au, 1998). Students construct knowledge in a variety of ways: through experience of life and the world (Phillips, 1995); through the interactions that take place in classroom discourse in which participants construct understandings about what constitutes literacy, what it means to be literate, norms and expectations for participation in classroom literacy activities, and the values inherent in literate activity (Green & Meyer, 1990); and through the use of dialogue with others (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1932). Participation in these interactions contributes to the individual's sense of self as a literate person—as a reader, writer, thinker, and knower (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). All of these external influences are essential to a child, but

he/she must adapt these ideas to have meaning and value in his/her life (Beck & Kosnik, 2006).

Students gain the most knowledge when they are given opportunities to work in their own zone of proximal development. In a regular education classroom, the variety of zones will differ among the various students. When a teacher continually presents material as whole class instruction, high ability students will not be adequately challenged and can become bored with the content and pace of the material presented. Grouping students with similar abilities allows these students the challenge they need in order to be adequately challenged. When students are working in their respective zones of proximal development, they need interaction with an adult or other high ability students in order to master work that they would be unable to master on their own (Vygotsky, 1978).

Based on the social constructivist theory, student learning takes place when they have the opportunity to work in their zone of proximal development. A student who continually works at his/her actual developmental level will stagnate because he/she is working at a level that is comfortable and can be done independently. When students work at a level that requires assistance from an adult or in collaboration with other students, the discussion generated between the two assists the student in gaining knowledge that is necessary to experience growth. Students who are only required to read text that is at their actual reading level will not experience growth. Text that incorporates higher-level vocabulary and more complex learning structures will ensure the challenge that is necessary for reading achievement to occur.

Transactional Theory of Reader Response

“We ‘make sense’ of a new situation or transaction and generate new meanings by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending public and private elements selected from our personal linguistic—experiential reservoirs” (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1367). The transactional theory of reader response proposes that the meaning a reader gleans from a text is not in the text or the reader, but is what happens during the transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978, 2004). Each reader brings a unique experience to his/her reading based on differences in social, ethnic, educational, and personal factors, and it is because of these differences that readers will construct their own meaning. As teachers, “. . . we need to understand where our pupils are in relation to books, and we need a sufficient command of books to see their potentialities in this developmental process. Our main responsibility is to help students to find the right book for growth” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 67). When the right match is made between the reader and the text, meaning happens.

The greater the reader’s ability to respond to the stimulus of the word and the greater his capacity to savor all that words can signify of rhythm, sound, and image, the more fully will he be emotionally and intellectually able to participate in the literary work as a whole. In return, literature will help the reader sharpen further his alertness to the sensuous quality of experience (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 48).

Rosenblatt (1995) believes reading can be referred to as a constructive process due to the fact that both the reader and the text are affected by what each party brings to the reading. If a text is too easy, the student can easily become bored; if too hard,

frustration can ensue. In either scenario, little knowledge is gained. In order for a reader to construct meaning, the text must be at his/her level. This theory represents the same points of view as the constructivist and social constructivist theories in that knowledge is gained when the material is presented at the appropriate level.

Rosenblatt (2005) also advocates that you must take into consideration what the student's purpose is for reading a selected text. Rosenblatt uses the term "reader's stance" or "mental set" to differentiate between reading for information - *efferent*, or reading for pleasure - *aesthetic*. The reading stance is basically an expression of purpose. A student who is reading to gain new knowledge, directions for some type of action, or looking for a logical conclusion is using the "efferent" stance. When a student uses this type of reading, he/she is looking for the meanings, the ideas, or the directions that will be retained after the reading (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Contrast this to the student who reads a story or poem and his/her attention is more focused on what is created in his/her own mind. This "aesthetic" stance centers on the types of feelings a student has from the reading, the ideas that are generated, and his/her attitude based on what is read (Rosenblatt, 2005). Depending on which stance the reader chooses to take will determine the meaning he/she takes away from the text. A transaction with texts that offer some linkage with the child's own experiences and concerns will give rise to new experiences and in turn open new linguistic windows into the world (Rosenblatt, 2005).

It is necessary to point out, however, that a text can be read in either or both of these stances. When a student reads an assigned text, the teacher may ultimately have intended one purpose for the selection. However, during the reading the student may find

a different purpose altogether. What is important to remember is the key ingredient of reading is the actual reciprocal transaction between both the reader and the text.

Based on the transactional theory of reader response, students come to the reading classroom with a variety of experiences and background knowledge. What is appropriate for one student will not be appropriate text for another. The gifted reader comes to the classroom with a greater knowledge, a larger vocabulary, and a deeper awareness of subtleties than an average or below average student (Dooley, 1993). Thus a differentiated reading program is important in developing each student to his/her maximum potential. Educators should expect a greater depth of understanding and more detailed and critical responses from the gifted reader than from other students in the classroom. However, it is imperative that educators foster this thinking by modeling those types of thinking skills and responses for the students.

All three of these theories are interrelated for this study. The constructive theory states that students build upon knowledge based on what they already know. When you add the social aspect to this learning, the social constructive theory comes into place. Another key component of the social constructive theory is the zone of proximal development, which states a student should be given work that is just above his/her comfort level. When taking into consideration the transactional theory of reader response, students need appropriate text in their zone of proximal development. The responses they illicit from that text will come from their own unique set of experiences.

Related Research

The three theories -- constructivist, social constructivist, and transactional theory of reader response are the foundation for effective literacy instruction and differentiation,

especially in the reading classroom. In the following sections, the areas of research that are discussed include differentiation and its response to student readiness, interest, learning profiles, and their effectiveness for gifted students; understanding giftedness and the special needs associated with that giftedness; effective literacy instruction; the use of reader response in a reading classroom, and research studies outlining the lack of differentiation being implemented in regular classrooms across the nation.

Differentiation

Subban (2006) conducted a literature review of differentiation in order to propose a rationale for supporting differentiated instruction. From this research three principles were gleaned from this review: (1) based on Vygotsky's (1978) grounded learning theory, there is a reciprocal social interaction which accommodates learning; (2) learning is social and encourages communication skills and the further development of cognitive functions; and (3) learning is increased if learners are engaged, can connect new information with existing knowledge, and are able to integrate this information based on individual learning style. Differentiation is further supported due to student diversity in today's classrooms, the detrimental effects of teaching to the middle, and increasing student engagement.

Differentiation (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003) is not a new concept. Teachers have been using differentiation since the inception of the one-room schoolhouse. When teachers use preferential seating, or allow students more time to complete an assignment, or spend extra time with a student going over a concept one more time, they are in essence, differentiating. This being said, what does differentiation mean in today's school setting? Tomlinson (2003) states, "Differentiated instruction is responsive

instruction” (p. 2). In a differentiated classroom, teachers realize all students are unique and differ in the way they learn and what they are interested in; and that the purpose of school is to maximize the capability of all students (Anderson, 2007).

Borland (2005) addresses the individual differences in students as follows:

. . . In other words, although I believe that all students are equal in their right to and need for an appropriate education, I do not believe that what constitutes an appropriate education is the same for all students born in a given calendar year. . . A one-size-fits-all curriculum makes no more sense to me than would a one-size-fits-all shoe. Moreover, along with my colleagues in the gifted education field, I believe that high-achieving or high-ability students are among those who are the most ill-served when curriculum and instruction are not differentiated. (pp. 1-2)

Mulhern (1978, 2003) addressed the issue of gifted students and their classroom learning by stating that even though some students may be identified as gifted and receive some type of gifted services outside of the regular classroom, it is the classroom teacher who is ultimately responsible for meeting the educational needs of all students in the regular classroom. It is imperative that educators begin to understand the implications of what this means. Gifted students are not “gifted” for short periods of time each week when they meet with their gifted facilitator; they need consistent academic challenge in order to meet their potential. Horwitz (1974) discussed the misconceptions of gifted students in the regular classroom by quoting Dr. Taffel, a principal of the Bronx High

School who understood these misconceptions and addressed the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom:

Our educational system has been built on the false assumption that a bright youngster, if no specific provision is made for him, will raise the level of the others in the class. This just doesn't happen. Unless his talent is recognized and provided for by a program that is truly challenging, that talent will simply deteriorate. Many bright students who are set adrift in a general school population that operates on an academic level lower than their capabilities just merge and become indistinguishable from their less-able classmates as the years go on. (p. 17)

Although these words were spoken many years ago, the message is still pertinent to today's educational dilemma. If educators are to meet the needs of the gifted student who spends the majority of his/her time in a heterogeneous classroom, differentiation is necessary. The term *differentiation*, and related terms including denoting modifications of curriculum and instruction appropriate to the needs of gifted learners (Kaplan, 1994, Ward, 1980) have been used in gifted education. In recent years the term *differentiation* has taken a broader meaning and refers to modifications in curriculum and instruction that are necessary to support students with academically diverse learning needs (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). What this means for a differentiated classroom is that adaptations need to be made to the content, process, product, affect, and learning environments in response to the readiness of the individual student, his/her interests, and learning profiles for the full range of learners in a classroom (Tomlinson, 1999, 2003). In

fact, differentiation should be seen as a pedagogical, rather than an organizational, approach (Stradling & Saunders, 1993). With this said, the research in gifted education supports classrooms that recognize, honor, and cultivate individuality (Tomlinson, 1999).

Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) believe that in order for differentiation to be successful, educators must rethink their beliefs about education. Teachers must realize that students learn at different rates, possess different abilities and interests, and acquire knowledge through different avenues. In other words, the classroom teacher is not the keeper of all knowledge, but recognizes that students have the ability to acquire information through independent study or homogeneous group work. Feedback from the teacher and direct instruction is still necessary, but the role of the teacher switches to that of a facilitator by providing learning opportunities that will empower the students in their academic growth.

Differentiation is instruction that recognizes the importance of the individual and centers around the beliefs that there are many different types of intelligences, the brain hungers for meaning, and that humans learn best with moderate challenge (Tomlinson, 1999). Over the years researchers in the study of intelligence have concluded that intelligence is not a single entity, but multifaceted. Gardner (1983) suggested there were seven intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Later, Gardner (1993) added an eighth intelligence, naturalistic. Sternberg (1985) proposed three kinds of intelligence: analytical, practical, and creative. Even though intelligences have been identified in various ways, there are two important implications that can be made: (1) all students think, learn, and create in their own distinct ways; and (2) the development of

potential is influenced by the collaboration between what we learn and how we learn with our particular intelligences (Tomlinson, 1999).

Research into how the brain functions has important implications for use in the educational setting. Students learn best when new information can be connected to prior knowledge. Byrnes (2001) states that students experience meaningful learning when they are able to integrate new information into the base of knowledge they already know or when they can assimilate the new information by looking at the relationship it has to what is already known. Curriculum that is characterized by materials that are of high interest and relevance to students will be more easily learned and students will derive more meaning from it. When students understand what they are learning instead of just memorizing facts, it is more likely that they will be able to transfer that information to new situations (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Appropriate challenge is needed for students to develop to their full potential. Tomlinson (1999) states, “A task is appropriately challenging when it asks learners to risk a leap into the unknown, but they have enough to get started and have additional support for reaching a new level of understanding” (p. 19). Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1997) propose that when tasks are too easy, boredom sets in, and when tasks are too hard, it can cause anxiety for students. In either situation, students are not able to learn effectively and can result in loss of motivation. Cox (2008) believes that it is important for differentiation to be implemented in the students’ elementary years because the experiences students have in those early school years will profoundly impact how they view school, including the learning process and how they perceive themselves as learners.

With this said, educators need to closely examine what differentiation is and how it should be incorporated into the classroom. Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2003) points out that in differentiated classrooms teachers modify the content, the process, and the products based on student readiness, student interest, and each student's individual learning profile.

Response to Student Readiness

Tomlinson (1999) describes student readiness as the beginning point at which students can begin to understand a new skill or concept, and states that a differentiated classroom embraces the following four beliefs:

- Respect the readiness level of each student.
- Expect all students to grow, and support their continual growth.
- Offer all students the opportunity to explore essential understandings and skills at degrees of difficulty that escalate consistently as they develop their understanding and skill.
- Offer all students tasks that look—and are—equally interesting, equally important, and equally engaging.

In relationship to student readiness, Byrnes (1996) draws on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory when he says that the instruction provided to students should always be just above their comfort zone. Basically, educators should aim their teaching levels to the student's zone of proximal development. When instruction is given to students above the zone of proximal development, those students will become frustrated. In contrast, if the instruction is below the zone students will become bored with the lesson and little

growth will be seen. It is when the right match is made between instruction and each student's zone of proximal development that academic growth will be experienced.

When responding to student readiness, teachers must work to ensure that all students are given meaningful tasks to complete. Even though these tasks are at various levels, they should be authentic and relevant to what the student is learning. These tasks should be just beyond the student's comfort level so that effort is required for each student to accomplish the goal of that lesson. The right amount of challenge is necessary for students to be motivated to learn.

Response to Student Interest

Student interest is one area in which a student's curriculum can be differentiated. Students enjoy and need the freedom to select topics of study that are of special interest to them. When students were asked about their regular education program, many comments centered on the fact that they had limited opportunity to pursue topics of their own choosing (Reis & Renzulli, 1989).

Differentiation that is responsive to student interest has an impact on motivation, productivity, relevance, creativity, talent development, flow experiences, and achievement in both the short and long term. Amabile (1983) propounds that when students are motivated to do an activity based on their own interest and enjoyment, they are more creative than when that activity is imposed by someone else. Hebert (1993) found in his longitudinal study that many students who were free to explore their interests in the elementary years developed those interests throughout their schooling and beyond. Carbonaro and Gamoran (2002) reported that when students were allowed some voice in their lessons, the expectations were elevated and they were likely to become more deeply

engaged in their academic work. Hidi (1990) wrote, “. . . interest is central to determining how we select and persist in processing certain types of information in preference to others. . . . Processing interesting information involves elements that are not present in processing information that lacks such interest” (p. 565).

Tomlinson (2001) believes there are specific strategies that teachers should strive for when incorporating student interest into the learning situation. Teachers should help students realize that there is a match between the school’s objective and the student’s desires to learn, and that teachers should explain the connections between all learning. It is important for teachers to make connections between skills or concepts that students are familiar with to those skills and concepts that are less familiar. With the implementation of these strategies, teachers can increase the student’s motivation to learn.

When students have an interest in what they are learning, motivation is higher. Teachers in a differentiated classroom know the importance of giving students a choice in order to provide a hook to engagement of the topic. This does not mean that each student decides independently what he/she will do, but rather that teachers will find a way to incorporate the student’s interest into the topic of study.

Response to Student Learning Profile

Students’ learning profiles are based on their preference for learning, and can be affected by such things as preferred learning style, intelligence preference, culture, and even gender. Tomlinson (2003) goes so far as to say that a learning profile attends to “efficiency of learning.” In order to maximize a student’s learning, it is important to understand what learning style means. Dunn, Dunn, and Treffinger (1992) defined learning style as the conditions under which each person begins to concentrate on,

process, internalize, and retain new and difficult information and skills. Just as learning styles vary across the heterogeneous school population, they also vary in gifted students. Differentiating teaching methods in the classroom to meet the diverse needs of students is important. Due to different learning style characteristics of students, the use of a single type of instruction in the classroom will be effective for some students but ineffective for others (Dunn & Milgram, 1993).

According to the Dunn and Dunn (1972) model, learning style is comprised of a unique combination of characteristics that allow for the receiving, storing, and retrieving of the knowledge and skills to which individuals have been exposed and what they find interesting or relevant to their lives. Dunn and Milgram (1993) outlined several premises upon which this model is based: (1) students have their own unique strengths; (2) students have their own instructional preferences; (3) students can learn to use their preferential learning style when asked to learn new and/or difficult material; (4) classroom teachers should adapt instruction, materials, and assignments to meet the individual student's learning style strengths; and (5) students will achieve at higher levels when differentiation of curriculum and instruction is incorporated into the classroom.

Based on the fact that there are differences in how gifted and talented students learn, Dunn (1993) believes the system of instruction implemented by the classroom teacher should provide:

- Resources responsive to each individual's strongest perceptual preference;
- Varying levels of independence, with an accent for most on either self-pacing or teaching one's self;

- Alternative environments responsive to personal needs for sound versus quiet, low versus bright illumination, warmth versus cool, informal versus formal seating arrangement, food and liquids, and mobility needs;
- Options for learning alone, with a friend or two, with the teacher, and/or in varied treatments as the occasion requires; and
- Opportunities to experiment with energy highs and lows at different times of the day. (p. 41)

Reis and Renzulli (1989) reported that when students were asked what instructional strategies they enjoyed when studying curricular materials, they identified nine strategies that were most preferred by students: (1) projects, (2) drill and recitation, (3) peer teaching, (4) discussions, (5) teaching games, (6) independent study, (7) programmed instruction, (8) lecture, and (9) simulation. In a differentiated classroom, teachers should look for ways to incorporate each of these instructional strategies into their lesson plans, and if these varied instructional strategies are not being implemented, it is unlikely that a differentiated program is actually being used.

The teacher in a differentiated classroom knows that students learn in different ways and finds ways to incorporate various teaching strategies. Tomlinson (2005b) believes that what students learn and how they learn should work together in order to guarantee that all students are consistently engaged with high quality ideas and processes.

Effective Differentiation

Differentiation is not merely a strategy teachers can incorporate into their varied teaching strategies. Differentiation is a whole new perspective on teaching, a change of

philosophy. A differentiated classroom begins with effective curriculum and instruction.

Tomlinson (2005b) outlines what this looks like:

1. Focuses squarely on the essential facts, concepts, principles, skills, and attitudes, which directs student attention to rich and profound ideas, and ensures grounding in what matters most in each topic and discipline.
2. Provides opportunity for students to understand clearly and in depth how the essential information, concepts, principles, and skills work to make meaning and be useful.
3. Engages the students affectively and cognitively so they find pleasure and satisfaction in what and how they learn.
4. Places the students at the center of learning and addresses the reality that different students will learn in different ways, at different paces, and will manifest different interests.
5. Has a product focus. Students are asked to transfer, apply, and extend what they have learned to solve problems, address issues, and create products that are meaningful and purposeful to the student.
6. Guides students in developing their capacities as thinkers and their awareness of their capacities as thinkers.
7. Is relevant to students' varied experiences and lives, including gender, culture, economic status, and exceptionality.
8. Coaches and supports students in developing the skills, tools, attitudes, and processes to become increasingly independent as learners. (pp. 161-162)

Even when quality curriculum and instruction are in place, teachers may realize that this does not always adequately meet the needs of the gifted student. Teachers will need to incorporate differentiation in the form of faster pacing, advanced materials that provide adequate challenge and allow students to pursue their interests. With the use of effective differentiation students learn about themselves as learners, which help them establish, maintain, and develop their commitment to learning. They realize that differentiation does not take the place of effective curriculum and instruction, but rather goes hand in hand. In order for differentiation to be effective, teachers must also be consistent with their use of differentiation (Tomlinson, 2005a).

Just as it is important to understand what makes differentiation effective, we must also examine the types of strategies a teacher uses to make differentiation effective. Brimijoin (2005) believes that teachers must be able to clarify what the learning goals are for students so that they are making connections between those goals and not just learning isolated facts. The teacher implements both formative and summative assessments in order to help him/her understand where students are in relationship to what is being taught and then makes adjustments to the curriculum so that students can move forward with their knowledge. When tasks are assigned, the teacher ensures that those tasks are respectful to all students so that they are actively engaged in the learning process. Not only do effective teachers group students in flexible grouping arrangements, but they also incorporate a variety of learning strategies to meet the range of abilities, interests, and learning profiles of their students. Effective teachers create classrooms where students celebrate each other's differences, independence, and successes.

For purposes of this study, it is imperative that educators take what is known about effective differentiation and apply those principles to the differentiated reading classroom. In a study that was conducted in the early 1980's, surveys were sent to leaders in the field of reading and gifted education. Through the use of these surveys, eight areas were earmarked as important components of a reading program for the gifted and included: independent research projects; opportunity to pursue independent research projects over a long period of time; development of research skills; use of higher-level questioning techniques; individual work with mentors; self-selected reading experiences; involvement with Great Books Program; and guided study of literature genre (Dole & Adams, 1983).

The emphasis for gifted readers in a differentiated reading classroom is different from that of other students. Catron and Wingenbach (1986) propose the following:

Curricular emphasis for these students should be on reading to learn rather than learning to read. Decoding skills should be minimized if taught at all. Comprehension skills should be emphasized through critical, creative, and inquiry reading. Reading for the gifted should provide opportunities for expanding previously developed comprehension skills, for building a rich vocabulary, and for becoming thinking people who look beyond the printed word as they read. (p. 140)

In addition Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) believe that the world of ideas is revealed to the gifted reader through literature. It is through the use of exposure to quality literature that students can build on the knowledge base that is essential for them to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. Teachers should provide

quality literature for gifted readers that encourages the development of critical thinking skills and allows them to discuss, analyze, and share their reading with others. A differentiated reading classroom can have a great impact on gifted readers. Through the use of quality literature based on readiness, appropriate pacing, and flexible grouping, gifted readers can receive the challenge that is necessary for them to reach their full potential.

Giftedness

In the field of gifted education there are many terms that are used to describe giftedness: *gifted and talented*, *high ability*, *gifted*, *gifted learner*, and *precocious*. Just as there are many terms used to describe these students, it is important to understand what is meant by giftedness. Gifted students are a diverse population of students in and of themselves. Educators in the field of gifted education are not able to come to a consensus as to a single definition, and over the years a variety of definitions have been expounded ranging from very restrictive to more liberal. It is important to the understanding of giftedness to explore the range of definitions that have been posited.

One of the early pioneers in gifted education, Lewis Terman (1925), conducted a longitudinal study of gifted students and defined giftedness as scoring two standard deviations above the norm on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. According to this restrictive definition, only a small number of children were identified as gifted.

Due to pressure concerning the education of high ability students, the U.S. Commission of Education was directed to conduct a study based on the needs of gifted students (Education of the Gifted and Talented Report to the Congress of the United

States, 1972). At that time, Public Law 91-230, Section 806 defined gifted and talented as:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. (p. 2)

The report went on to discuss gifted children as having either demonstrated achievement and/or the potential to achieve in the following areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability. The gifted child may exhibit achievement in one or more of the above listed areas. The estimate was that the gifted child would represent from three to five percent of the school population and that identification of gifted children should include a variety of sources including objective measures and professional evaluation measures.

The Education of the Gifted and Talented Report to the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Commissioner of Education (1972) further went on to establish three characteristics for a differentiated educational program.

1. A differentiated curriculum which denotes higher cognitive concepts and processes.
2. Instructional strategies which accommodate the learning styles of the gifted and talented and curriculum content.

3. Special grouping arrangements which include a variety of administrative procedures appropriate to particular children, i.e., special classes, honor classes, seminars, resource rooms, and the like. (pp. 2-3)

Over the years, many proponents of gifted students have proposed a definition of giftedness that is less restrictive. Renzulli (2005) defined giftedness as manifesting itself in two different kinds of persons: the schoolhouse-gifted person, who excels at test-taking and learning school lessons, and the creative-productive gifted person, whose giftedness manifests itself through the development of original products that have no impact on society. When looking at creative-productive giftedness, Renzulli pointed out that it arises from three interdependent constructs and that each of these constructs must contribute equally to giftedness. These three constructs that were outlined were above-average general ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 1978; Vosslamber, 2002).

- Above-average ability: This does not mean high IQ, but “a wide field of general and specific ability” (Vosslamber, 2002, p. 15). Gifted readers exhibit many of the following indicators: advanced IQ, high scores on language achievement tests, higher levels of reading than peers, large vocabulary, good memory of things read, strong comprehension of texts, and early reading.
- Task commitment: This involves “the capacity for sustained motivation, dedicated practice, and excellence in the development of ideas and products” (Vosslamber, 2002, p. 15). Many gifted readers exhibit the following indicators: long attention span, voracious reading, selection of high-level

reading materials, and spontaneous reading of materials to prove/disprove points.

- Creativity: This construct “involves fluency, flexibility, and originality of thought, the ability to produce novel and effective solutions to problems, and to create clever original products” (Vosslamber, 2002, p. 15). Indicators of this area for gifted readers include: complex thoughts and ideas, good judgment and logic, forms the relationship between concepts, produces original ideas and products, appreciates beauty, sense of humor, divergent thinking, problem-solving strategies used to solve unanswered questions, high level of sensitivity and empathy, concern over moral and ethical issues and a strong sense of justice, and social leadership abilities.

Tannenbaum (1997) posited his definition of giftedness in children to denote their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity. A definition that is proposed by Sternberg (1985) defines giftedness in relation to his triarchic theory of intelligence that posits three distinct forms of intelligence: analytic, creative, and practical. He has extended this information processing approach in his discussion of how the mental processes of gifted children resemble the cognitive processes of persons who, through study and work, have become experts in their fields.

Gardner (1983) defined giftedness as a sign of precocious potential in one or more of the independent multiple intelligences including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic

intelligence. Gagne (2004) went on to propose a distinction between the concept of giftedness and the concept of talent in his Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). He argued that giftedness denotes untrained and spontaneously expressed superior natural abilities in at least one ability domain. The natural abilities of giftedness can develop over time through an interaction with intrapersonal and environmental catalysts and chance, leading to systematically developed skills or talent in a field of human endeavor. For both giftedness and talent, performance places the individual in the top 10% of age peers.

Kansas Special Education Regulation 91-40-1 (bb) (2008) defines giftedness in Kansas as:

Performing or demonstrating the potential for performing at significantly higher levels of accomplishment when compared to others of similar age, experience and environment. This level of accomplishment may be demonstrated by exceptional performance due to general intellectual ability or by excellence in one or more specific academic fields.

A quandary exists for educators as they look at the area of gifted students versus gifted readers. Not all academically gifted students read at high levels, and not all gifted readers will be identified as gifted due to the variation of abilities in this special population of learners (Jackson, 1988). What is the relationship that exists between precocious reading ability and general intellectual giftedness? A review of the literature indicates that a high level of general intelligence does not guarantee that a child will be a precocious reader. Realizing, therefore, that some highly intelligent children do not read

early and that some precocious readers are of average or below average intelligence, admittance into a gifted program should not be based solely on precocious reading ability (Reis & Renzulli, 1989). “The modest association between precocious reading achievement and general intelligence means that some precocious readers will not be especially adept at the kinds of learning and reasoning required for success in many gifted programs during the later elementary school years” (Jackson, 1988, p. 201). Regardless of whether a precocious reader is identified as a gifted student or not, that student still needs a differentiated curriculum to provide the necessary challenge. The responsibility for teachers to modify the reading curriculum exists for the precocious reader even if he/she does not qualify for gifted services (Reis & Renzulli, 1989).

With the variation in definitions for giftedness and the fact that not all gifted students are gifted readers and not all gifted readers are identified gifted, how do we define “gifted readers?” This question is essential to understanding the gifted readers in the proposed study. Once again there are a number of definitions that are expounded by gifted proponents. Bonds and Bonds (1982) identified primary gifted readers as children who, upon entering first grade, are reading substantially above grade level or who possess the ability to make rapid progress in reading when given the proper instruction. They found that if the gifted readers’ capacity for outstanding achievement in reading is to be developed and not stifled, then the classroom teacher must assess students’ reading ability to determine whether or not the reading curriculum is sufficient or if the student would benefit from the implementation of differentiation strategies to provide more challenging text.

Dole and Adams (1983) defined gifted readers as being able to read at approximately two years or more above their grade equivalent level by using some source of standardized reading test, and they were identified as having the potential for reading well above others in their same age group. Kaplan (1999) described talented readers as avid, enthusiastic, voracious readers who are able to use reading for different purposes. According to Stainthorp and Hughes (2004), many gifted readers teach themselves to read prior to any formal instruction either at home or at school. Mason and Au (1990) defined gifted readers as having exceptional reading ability and the capacity to understand textual information well above what would be expected of other students in their age group, a broader base of knowledge across many different topics with larger vocabularies, and generally experience no problems with word identification.

Just as any other group has characteristics that set them apart, gifted readers also have specific characteristics that are unique to them. Halsted (2002) found that gifted readers understand language subtleties, use language for humor, write words and sentences early, and produce superior creative writing. There are some gifted readers who automatically integrate prior knowledge and experience into their reading; utilize higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; and are able to successfully communicate those ideas (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Gifted readers may display advanced verbal understanding of language, have an expansive vocabulary, perceive relationships between and among characters, and grasp complex ideas (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooley, 1993; Levande, 1993).

Gifted readers are able to transfer learning from one area to another more easily than average ability peers. In a study of transfer of learning between bright students and

average students, Sullivan and Skanes (1971) found that the younger, brighter students showed greater positive transfer of learning than did other students. Transfer was expressed as a “change in performance on one task with change resulting from practice on another” (p. 292). Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards, Jacobs, Eckert, Renzulli, and Alexander (2003) identified four characteristics that are most often applied to gifted readers: enjoyment in the reading process, above level reading, advanced processing, and advanced language skills.

There can also be negative characteristics associated with gifted readers. Moore (2005) pointed out that gifted readers, and especially young gifted readers, can display some or all of these negative characteristics: self-criticism, inability to deal with failure, boredom with grade-level curriculum, inappropriate behavioral outbursts or reactions, sloppy work, demanding of their parents’ and teachers’ attention, demanding of other students, inconsiderate of others needs/wants, and difficulty transitioning from one subject to the next during the school day. Other negative outcomes of gifted readers include pushing themselves to read any text they can decode before they have the emotional maturity to comprehend the material. A major problem becomes finding age appropriate reading material, especially fiction, for students who read above grade level (Halsted 2002).

Needs of Gifted Readers

Due to the fact that gifted students, and specifically, gifted readers spend the majority of time in a regular heterogeneous classroom, their needs must be met in those settings. Byrnes (2001) identified four educational implications for gifted readers in heterogeneous classes based on the social constructivist theory. *Teachers should act as*

“scaffolds” in which they provide just enough guidance so as to help children make progress on their own. For example, instead of intrusively telling a child how to solve a problem step-by-step, a teacher should do things such as start problems and ask children to finish them, or give hints that help students discover a solution on their own.

Instruction should always be in advance of a child’s current level of mastery. That is, teachers should teach within a child’s zone of proximal development. If material is presented at or below the mastery level, there will be no growth and children can become bored. If it is presented well beyond the zone, there will also be no growth, and students may be confused and frustrated. In order for children to internalize a skill, *instruction should progress in four phases.* In the first phase, teachers should model the skill and give a verbal commentary regarding what they are doing and why. In the second phase, students should try to imitate what the teacher has done (including the verbal commentary). Early on, children may perform poorly so teachers need to give verbal feedback and correct errors. In the third phase, teachers should progressively “fade” from the scene as children gain more and more mastery over the skill. *Children need to be repeatedly confronted with scientific conceptions* in order for their spontaneous concepts to become more accurate and general. According to Vygotsky (1978), all fields (i.e., math, science, social studies, the arts, etc.) have scientific concepts, not just science, so this implication is true for all subject areas.

As outlined above, characteristics of some gifted readers such as persistent curiosity, superior recall, and the ability to understand complex ideas, may not be readily apparent when these students are required to work at the same pace and level as other students in the class (Davis & Johns, 1991). There are some students who will develop

poor study habits, produce only minimum work, or be unwilling to face the challenge that will surface at some point in their academic careers (Betts & Neihart, 1988). An even more alarming statistic based on inadequate challenge is that the reading levels of gifted readers may decline by the time they reach middle school if there has been an absence of challenge in their reading curriculum (Reis & Renzulli, 1989).

As set forth in the theoretical section, students need challenge in their zone of proximal development. Betts and Neihart (1988) state that while some gifted readers maintain their enthusiasm for reading, others lose interest or become content with reading less demanding selections. It is imperative that the classroom teacher follows effective literacy practices while providing differentiated instruction for the gifted reader.

One of the challenges faced by classroom teachers is providing appropriate, challenging instruction for gifted readers. Chall and Conrad (1991) evaluated text difficulty to reader readiness and reported that the language arts basal textbooks used in many classrooms did not provide adequate challenge to the gifted reader because the reading level was matched to grade level and not the actual reading level of readers.

There is a concern about the negative impact that current practices of full-time heterogeneous grouping and whole group instruction have had on gifted readers' growth and motivation to learn. Due to the fact that gifted readers typically read two or more years above grade level (Davis & Johns, 1991), read widely, have advanced vocabularies, and have acquired knowledge about a variety of topics (Van Tassel-Baska, Feldhusen, Seeley, Wheatley, Silverman, & Foster, 1988), they may not be challenged by the grade level reading materials that are used in heterogeneous classrooms. Horwitz (1974) classifies these children as high in abstract thinking and independent thought and

judgment and says that they may have interests that are different from other children their own age and may express concern about issues dealing with morality, problems of international relations, and world peace. They may even express fervent curiosity in select areas and read more than average children, have longer attention spans, and enthusiastically work on self-directed projects. Research has shown that holding an advanced reader to a grade-level reading curriculum can negatively impact his/her continued above-average reading development (Gentry, 1999; Kulik & Kulik, 1996).

Collins and Aiex (1995) outline several key factors that are necessary as teachers address the curriculum needs of the gifted reader. Teachers should provide reading instruction that is different than what is given to other readers. This reading instruction should not be based solely on a skill-oriented approach, but should focus on developing higher cognitive level comprehension skills including critical reading that requires the reader to evaluate the material that is being read. The teacher should also select a variety of reading materials based on student readiness. The literature that is selected should be of high quality and include complex learning structures and higher-level vocabulary. Reading should be viewed as a way to encourage and promote a lifelong passion for reading.

Classroom teachers must remember that gifted readers can move through the materials more quickly, they will desire to go deeper into ideas, and will be willing to discuss more and in greater depth. Because of this, an emphasis should be placed on providing critical reading, creative reading, and inquiry reading into the curriculum, as these require different skills and responses by the student. Thus, an appropriate, differentiated reading program is vital to the academic growth of gifted readers and for

their continued motivation to learn (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Dole and Adams (1983) conducted a study to determine the components that are necessary for gifted readers. In their findings they determined that while there are many strategies that benefit both the gifted and average reader, they listed the elements they believed were most important for gifted readers. This list included: independent research projects; an opportunity to pursue independent research projects over a long period of time; development of research skills; the use of higher-level questioning techniques; individual work with mentors; self-selected reading experiences; involvement with the Great Books Program; and guided study of various literature genres.

Due to the fact that classrooms are becoming more diverse, teachers must change the way they provide instruction to students. Teachers must alter their philosophy of teaching and understand that the one-size-fits all approach is not an effective way to teach. As educators look at the needs of gifted readers in a heterogeneous classroom, the implications are clear that in order for those needs to be met teachers need to begin to differentiate curriculum and instruction.

Effective Literacy Instruction

It is vital for this study to determine what constitutes effective literacy instruction and what qualities a differentiated reading teacher should exhibit in the reading classroom. Once this has been accomplished, differentiation can then be implemented in the reading classroom. The International Reading Association (2000) used a meta-analysis of research to provide a description of the distinguishing qualities that excellent classroom reading teachers should possess:

1. Teachers understand reading and writing development, and believe all children can learn to read and write.
2. They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
3. They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
4. They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
5. They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
6. They use good reading "coaches" (that is, they provide help strategically).

Effective reading teachers are vital to effective literacy instruction. They know they make a difference in their students' motivation to read. These teachers use a wide variety of assessments in order to provide appropriate instruction for each child and also have large quantities of suitable reading texts. They know when to use whole-group instruction effectively and when small-group instruction is more appropriate. Effective literacy teachers model reading strategies and interact with students (International Reading Association, 2000). It appears that the qualities that are deemed to be essential for effective literacy instruction align with many of the tenets of differentiation.

Allington (2002) conducted a study of first and fourth grade teachers in six different states, including hundreds of days observing in classrooms and hundreds of interviews of classroom teachers, to determine what constituted expert, exemplary reading instruction. Based on this study Allington outlined six common features of effective elementary literacy, which he determined were responsive to children's needs.

- *Time to read.* Effective classroom teachers had students reading for longer periods of time, they were reading more independently, and using a greater variety of texts. Less time was spent on test-preparation workbooks, copying vocabulary definitions from a dictionary, or completing after-reading comprehension worksheets.
- *A rich variety of texts.* These teachers realized how important it was to give students choice in what they read and they had texts to match the students' individual reading levels. The student's motivation for reading was improved when they had access to multi-level, multi-sourced curricula that met the needs of the diverse range of students in the classroom.
- *Effective instruction.* In other words, teaching. These teachers gave direct, explicit demonstrations of cognitive strategies that readers need, and did not rely on "worksheets" as a way for students to learn. They realized that modeling and demonstrating the skills were more important.
- *Talk.* Instead of the usual teacher question/student answer syndrome, teachers and students discussed ideas and concepts together. The teacher posed more "open-ended" questions. Students were challenged to discuss their ideas with other students without the teacher commenting after each student spoke.
- *Tasks.* The assignments that were given were tailored to the needs of the individual student. The teacher also allowed for some choice in the assignments. These classroom teachers did not fill up the day with short, ineffective assignments, but instead chose longer assignments that were more substantive and challenging. The students in these classrooms were not

comparing the low-achieving student work to high achieving student work because each task was interesting and different.

- *Testing.* Evaluation in these classrooms was based on effort and improvement. In this type of classroom, the students had a greater responsibility for earning grades. Grades were not based on achievement because high ability students typically do not have to put much effort into the assignments they produce in order to receive an “A.” But instead, assignments were based and graded on the individual students’ level. All students win in this type of situation because the effort a student puts into the class is reflected in his/her grade.

Allington (2002) applauded these effective teachers because they stood up for what they believed and many times were forced to teach against the organizational grain. They rejected using the same book on each student’s desk, and using scripted lesson, pacing schedules, and grading schemes that were seen as a one-size-fits-all model for instruction. In order to provide the type of literacy instruction they believed was necessary, they spent their own money to increase the classroom library.

Blair, Rupley, and Nichols (2007) used a meta-analysis of research from the past 20 years that looked into the classroom practices of teachers who promoted student learning and growth. They outlined their list of effective reading instructions that included assessment, explicit instruction, opportunity to learn, attention to learning tasks, and teacher expectations. Effective reading instruction cannot be measured with a single standardized test. Ongoing assessments that include informal tests, observations, portfolios, student judgment of performance, and teacher reflection increase the ability to

provide instruction that meets the student's level of reading development. Explicit instruction refers to the way teachers convey new information to students by using effective communication skills through the use of teacher-student interactions and teacher direction of student learning. This instruction takes the form of either skills or strategies for comprehension and requires different teacher strategies. Effective instruction is based on the student's needs and development of those skills. Modeling is important for students to understand how to apply the reading skills they need to continue their learning.

In order for students to learn, they must have materials that are appropriate for their reading level. When reading materials are developmentally appropriate, the students will be more engaged and attentive to their work. It follows that the more time students are able to spend on actual content reading, the more successful they will become. Just as it is important to provide appropriate reading material for each student, the reading teacher must set high expectations for each student. Communicating these high expectations for each student both privately and publicly is vital to increasing student reading levels.

Blair et al. (2007) concluded that effective reading instruction meets the individual needs of students, and does not lower expectations for any student based on his/her reading level. Reading is seen as an interaction between the reading materials, the student, his/her development levels, and the learning goals for each student.

In order to improve reading achievement in an urban elementary school in San Diego, California, a literacy framework was adopted. Fisher and Frey (2007) outlined the key components to this effective literacy framework. The beliefs that this framework was

built on included: learning is social; conversations are critical for learning; reading, writing, and oral language instruction must be integrated; and learners require a gradual increase in responsibility.

When using a constructivist approach to reading instruction, Cambourne (2002) believes there are five principles that are essential for teachers to incorporate into their classroom: (1) Create a classroom culture that supports and encourages deep engagement with multiple demonstrations of effective reading behavior. (2) Employ teaching activities and strategies that are a judicious mix of the four dimensions of teaching and learning. (3) Employ structures and processes that create continuous opportunities for the development of intellectual unrest. (4) Develop each learner's metatextual awareness of the processes and understandings implicit in effective reading behavior. (5) Design and use tasks that will coerce authentic use of the processes and understandings implicit in effective reading behavior (p. 30).

In order for gifted readers to continually build their knowledge, teachers must develop systematic learning experiences that challenge students to explore and develop their own ideas. In a differentiated classroom, the teacher must provide appropriately leveled materials for each student so he/she is continually reevaluating what is already known and then discovering how he/she can incorporate these new ideas into personal beliefs. Teachers must provide and model the strategies that are necessary for students to further develop their critical thinking by encouraging students to write their thoughts and questions in journals as they proceed through the literature they are reading (Ollmann, 1996). When students take the time to reflect on what they have read, they develop and improve upon their reading and writing skills. Through the use of whole group and small

group discussions, students also have the opportunity to further develop their critical thinking by listening to other students' thoughts and ideas and then questioning what those ideas really mean for them.

Gould (1996) outlines two key areas that teachers must address when using the constructivist framework in their classrooms. The gifted learners should be involved in the selection of activities that are both appropriately challenging and intrinsically motivating and teachers must provide the appropriate support for students to construct concepts, values, schemata, and problem solving abilities.

In a differentiated classroom, each student is provided with materials that best meet his/her individual needs. These materials should be based on each student's interests and at a reading level that will provide the appropriate level of challenge. When a student is given the opportunity to work at his/her own level, it provides a sufficient amount of challenge so the student does not become bored because it is too easy, or frustrated because the material is too hard. Allowing students to work at the optimal level of challenge provides students with the motivation and desire to continue working.

Students learn when they have a chance to interact with others through the use of literature circles (Daniels, 2002). This interaction is a key component of social constructivism. This interaction, which takes place between students, between students and teachers, between teachers and parents, and between parents and students, is vital to the development of student achievement. Learning occurs as students are actively participating in small group settings, and effective teachers allow ample opportunities for students to meet in groups with their peers. The element of conversation is necessary if we want students to be critical thinkers. Students need to develop more sophisticated

types of talk that enables them to question the world around them and form opinions and judgments based on the information they receive.

Integration of reading, writing, and oral language instruction is necessary for students to learn. While reading and writing each have their own unique qualities, the relationship between the two is complementary (Fisher & Frey, 2007). When students are allowed to share their writing with others, they bring their voice to life.

Students must be taught to become more autonomous. Providing modeling and small group instruction is beneficial for students to learn the necessary skills and then transfer these skills to their own learning. It is important to note that this does not mean more time is spent on independent projects, but involves peer-lead literature circles, partner reading, and peer-response groups (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

Duke and Pearson (2002) believe that effective literacy instruction should include a balanced comprehensive instruction for both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a large allotment of time spent in reading, writing, and discussing the text. The two components that make up this balanced instruction include a supportive classroom context and a model of comprehension instruction. A supportive classroom context includes several key features such as giving students the opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills, and strategies they have by spending large amounts of time in actual reading. Students should also have plenty of interaction with real texts that have a specific purpose. The texts students read should include a variety of literature genres, technical books, manuals, instructional books, and other types of reading materials. It is also vital to incorporate discussion of vocabulary words and their meanings along with hands-on activities that will develop vocabulary and background knowledge. Students

should also have plenty of opportunities to write and discuss what they have read. The discussions should not be limited to teacher-led types of discussions, but should also involve student-student dialogue. These conversations should allow for interpretations of the text, past experiences and knowledge, and discussion of reading goals.

The model of comprehensive instruction outlined by Duke and Pearson (2002) allows for a gradual decline in teacher involvement. At the beginning, teachers give explicit instruction in a specific strategy and demonstrate how students will use the strategy in their reading. The teacher then models how the specific instruction is used in his/her own reading. Next, the teacher involves the students in collaborative use of the strategy and together they practice. The teacher then gradually releases the responsibility to the students until finally the students are able to use the strategy independently in their own reading.

In a well-balanced classroom, instruction is important, but students should be allowed plenty of time to read, write, and discuss literature. Students must have access to a plethora of books at their reading level and interests. Along with reading, students must be given the time to discuss what they have read with others. Just as important as allowing time to read and discuss, writing is another key aspect of balanced comprehension instruction. Students need opportunities to develop their own critical thinking through the use of writing. Writing in response journals and allowing time for students to write across the various genres allows students to develop thinking skills right along with writing skills.

Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (2007) stated, “The goal of comprehensive literacy instruction is to ensure that all students achieve their full literacy potential

Comprehensive literacy instruction is in keeping with constructivist learning theory and social learning perspectives that emphasize the development of students' cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking and decision making" (p. 14). Gambrell et al. (2007) listed components they believed were necessary to ensure a comprehensive literacy curriculum: uses a balanced approach, incorporates evidence-based best practices, builds on the knowledge that students bring to school, acknowledges that reading and writing are reciprocal processes, recognizes that comprehension is the ultimate goal of literacy instruction, emphasizes meaning construction through literacy tasks and activities that require critical thinking, offers opportunities for students to apply literacy strategies in the context of meaningful tasks, provides for differentiated instruction in accordance with the diverse strengths and needs of students (p. 15).

The classroom teacher that is adept at using the various components of a comprehensive literacy classroom as outlined above will be able to increase the engagement of his/her students, as well as increase the achievement of all students. In addition to the components that make up such a classroom, the teacher must incorporate evidence-based practices into his/her classroom. Gambrell et al. (2007) delineated what they considered to be the ten evidenced-based best practices for comprehensive literacy instruction:

- Create a classroom culture that fosters literacy motivation.
- Teach reading for authentic meaning-making literacy experiences: for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task.
- Provide students with scaffold instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension to promote independent reading.

- Give students plenty of time to read in class.
- Provide children with high-quality literature across a wide range of genres.
- Use multiple texts to link and expand vocabulary and concepts.
- Building a whole-class community that emphasizes important concepts and builds upon prior knowledge.
- Balance teacher- and student-led discussions of texts.
- Use technologies to link and expand concepts.
- Use a variety of assessment techniques to inform instruction. (p. 19)

An effective literacy classroom will provide instruction that meets the needs of all students and takes into account their prior knowledge and skills. Through the use of appropriate authentic texts, students will develop their reading comprehension, writing skills, and oral communication skills. When effective practices are used in the reading classroom, students will be motivated to become life-long literacy learners.

In the present study effective literacy practices and differentiation strategies were incorporated into the reading program of a fifth grade classroom. The gifted readers had their needs met through the use of faster pacing of materials, challenging text across several genres, and the development of critical thinking. The classroom teacher used flexible grouping of students when teaching reading strategies. Continued modeling and scaffolding of reading strategies was given to those students who needed additional help in mastering the concept. The gifted readers were placed in a small group for the literature circle discussions. Critical thinking and deeper comprehension was incorporated into the classroom through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions.

Response to Literature

In the transactional theory of reading response, Rosenblatt (1938) advocates “. . . that the literary experience grows out of the relation between an individual mind and personality and the literary work” (p. 64). The meaning constructed from this relationship will be unique to each reader based on differences in social, ethnic, educational, and personal factors (Rosenblatt, 1938). Educators can enhance the readers’ literacy development by providing appropriately challenging text.

Another basic tenet of the transactional theory of reading response proposes that readers read text along a continuum between the *efferent stance* (reading for information) and the *aesthetic stance* (reading for pleasure) (Rosenblatt, 1978). When readers select a text to read, they decide what stance they will incorporate into the reading. However, depending on the text selected, the reader may move from one stance to another along the continuum throughout the reading. One section of a text may provoke a more aesthetic stance when the reader is moved to tears or laughs about a particular episode in the book. Later, the reader may move into the efferent stance of reading when he/she learns some new piece of information or a new idea is introduced. Teachers can also have an impact in the type of stance a reader takes when reading an assigned text. If the teacher poses questions that ask for details about a story, development of plot, or story elements, the reader will be looking for the information he/she will need to answer those questions. In contrast, if the teacher’s questions ask for connections the reader can make to themselves or other books the reader has read, this requires a more aesthetic type of reading.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) propose a third stance for readers as they interact with text, the *critical stance*. When readers use a critical stance they are

encouraged to not only read and understand the words that are written, but also analyze and evaluate them. Readers should question the perspective of the author and consider the text from alternative perspectives rather than passively accepting it. When using a critical stance approach to reading, the focus should look at ways in which the text is constructed in a historical, political, and social context (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2006). One of the goals of “critical stance” is for readers to comprehend information sources from a critical stance as easily as they comprehend from an aesthetic or efferent stance.

Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening (2000) make the distinction between the act of reading and the response that a reader has from the text. One of the goals of teaching reading is to develop and evaluate the reading experience of students and their response to reading. It is through the use of response journals and literature circles that educators can involve students in responding to literature across the genres. Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening (2000) believe that the purpose of response journals is to create a joint sharing of affective and cognitive responses between the student and the teacher and the use of literature circles encourages the free expression of reader’s opinions including disagreeing with one another. It is through the use of response journals and literature circles that critical thinking can be taught. Students come to realize that the text comes to life as the reader encounters it.

Marshall (2000) believes that in order for readers to move from a passive form of reading to more active reading requires the reader to give some response to the literature that is being read. That response can take many forms including verbal, written, artistic, or dramatic, but until that response is shared with others it remains hidden inside the reader. Hancock (2008b) also believes that responses such as art, music, movement,

drama, and oral and written language are tools that students can use when thinking about, responding to, and extending an understanding of what they have read.

Hancock (2008a) outlines several characteristics in a reader response view of literature and teaching:

- Instruction is primarily *literature based* because it is accomplished through real children's books with a balance of time spent on reading and some time spent on reading instruction itself.
- Instruction is *child centered* with choice an honored aspect of the program. Topics and purposes are keyed to children's interests and needs and authenticity sparks motivation both for readers and lifelong learners.
- Instruction is *integrated* with the language arts as listening, speaking, writing, viewing, and visual representation become outlets for response to literature.
- Instruction is *balanced* with the strategies and skills being applied and practiced in the *authentic context of literature*. (p. 44)

The characteristics of a reader response view of teaching literature are parallel to effective literacy practices. The goals, as outlined by Hancock (2008a), include meeting the needs of the diverse range of students in the classroom and ensuring reading success for all students, which can only be accomplished when literature is available in a wide variety of genres and reading levels. Readers also assume a greater responsibility for their own learning and in the process become risk takers. Their confidence grows as they make personal connections between the text and their own lives, and have the chance to share their views without the fear of finding the "single" correct response.

Students soon learn that reading is a process, and as they interact with the literature they begin using various reading strategies to help them through the process. This interaction results in higher-level thinking on the part of students and they become more critical of the literature they are reading. Students who are part of a reader response classroom become “. . . reflective thinkers, and decision makers through a steady diet of response. Their ability to share their own responses while accepting the opinions of others transcends the school setting” (Hancock, 2008a, p. 47).

When students are encouraged to share their personal connections of a text with other students including different perspectives and interpretations, they grow in self-awareness and understanding of the text (Tice, 2008). There is much to be gained from these types of experiences. Rosenblatt (1982) states, “Literacy experiences have the potential for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world” (p. 276).

When students engage in discussions about literature the research shows improved reading comprehension, higher level thinking skills, and increased literacy motivation (Almasi, 1995; Almasi, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997). Students learn when they have the opportunity to share their ideas and respond to the ideas of other students. This interaction between students allows them to challenge the ideas of other students and helps build higher-level thinking. Discussions with other students can be beneficial to students when they wrestle with sections of a text they did not fully understand (Gambrell, 2004).

This discussion and sharing of literature with others is the heart of literature circles. Day, Spigel, McLellan, and Brown (2002) believe that a reader may not gain a deeper understanding of the text or ideas presented by the author if the reader is restricted to only his/her point of view. When students can share their thoughts and ideas with each other, a greater depth of understanding will be reached. When students participate in literature circles they must be active participants freely voicing their views and feelings. Talking, however, is only half of the necessary participation. Students must also be active listeners. They must learn to listen carefully to others' points of views and reactions. It is through this combined participation of listening and speaking that students are able to take away the deepest meaning from the text. Daniels (2002) believes that, "this type of interaction engages students in higher levels of thinking: drawing inferences, forming hypotheses, making judgments, and supporting conclusions about what they read" (p. 5).

It is imperative that critical thinking be incorporated consistently in order for gifted readers to reach their academic potential (Dixon, Prater, Vine, Wark, Williams, Hanchon, & Shobe, 2004). Gifted readers have the propensity to think at higher levels and educators must create opportunities for these types of skills to be developed. As educators guide the gifted reader they are better able to express their thoughts in discussions.

Research studies have outlined the benefits and problems associated with students participating in literature discussion groups (Daniels, 2002; Day, et al, 2002; Maloch, 2002). In these studies, literature discussion groups were composed of heterogeneous

groupings of students. However, little research has been conducted in the area of homogeneous grouping of gifted readers in literature discussions.

Wollman-Bonilla (1994) conducted a study in which two sixth-grade literature discussion groups were analyzed. One discussion group consisted of relatively weak readers and the second group consisted of strong readers. The students were grouped according to scores they received on an Informal Reading Inventory administered during the first two weeks of school. The findings from this study revealed that there was indeed a difference in the type of “talk” used between the two groups. The stronger reading group was able to conduct discussions that were student-dominated and were more like informal conversations with students responding appropriately to one another. The weaker discussion group needed consistent help from the classroom teacher. The students did not actively participate, but waited to be called on in order to respond to a question that was usually initiated by the teacher.

Students were assigned different novels based on the readiness of the group. The classroom teacher in this study believed that if only one text had been used for all students, some students would have experienced frustration with the reading and others would have experienced boredom. Later, this same classroom teacher developed a heterogeneous group from the two distinct groups and reported that the weaker students were no more or less involved in the discussions than in their previous homogeneous grouping. The current study will attempt to fill a gap in the research that investigates how implementing a differentiated reading program in a heterogeneous fifth grade classroom influences the gifted readers’ ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience.

As students become more comfortable in sharing their feelings with others about the text, students should then be encouraged to transition to written response in journals. Hancock (2008a) states,

The written response to literature captures the fleeting thoughts of readers in print, creating a permanent record of the ongoing responses of a reader to literature. Developmentally, written response builds on all of the other response modes and finds itself near the peak of the developmental hierarchy of response. (p. 275)

Hancock (1993) originally conducted a study in which written response to realistic fiction in literature response journals was analyzed. The students in this study were gifted sixth grade students in a gifted self-contained classroom of approximately 25 students. In this study students read four separate award-winning novels and completed a response journal for each novel. The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning-making process of students as they interacted with text. This interaction was documented through the use of the students' written response as they read the selected literature. Responses of students were classified into nine separate categories and divided into three groups: immersion, self-involvement, and detachment. Three of the four students were fairly consistent in their use of varied responses throughout the reading of each novel. The responses elicited from the fourth student indicated a more detached sense to the meaning-making process. The responses by the individual students portrayed the uniqueness of each of the individuals in the process of building meaning of the text while they read.

As students develop their reader response, they become active participants in the reading experience. Reading comes alive for these students as it evokes past experiences or challenges them to rethink their ideas. They become critical thinkers and are able to express and defend their beliefs. This study will document the development of critical thinking as the gifted reader responds to appropriately challenging quality literature through the use of response journals and literature circles.

After examining the research concerning effective literacy practices, reader response, and differentiation strategies, the question then becomes how do educators use the information they have learned and transform it into effective literacy practice for the gifted reader? Gifted readers come with their own unique set of characteristics and needs. The intent of this present study is to meld the effective literacy practices of the regular classroom, including response to literature through response journals and literature circles, with differentiated curriculum and instruction that is appropriate for gifted readers. This study will attempt to fill a gap that appears in the literature concerning homogenous grouping of gifted readers in literature discussion groups in heterogeneous reading classrooms and their response to the literature with critical thinking and deeper comprehension.

Related Research Studies

Even with all the research outlining the benefits of differentiation and the numerous books and articles written outlining how to implement differentiation in the classroom, studies consistently report that little differentiation is occurring for gifted learners in regular classrooms, a pattern that remains virtually unchanged in the past 10 years (Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). In this section, three major studies from

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented will be summarized. These research studies became the main motivation for this research. The first two studies illustrate that even though past research has shown that differentiation is essential for gifted students and gifted readers to be appropriately challenged in the regular classroom, the results show that very little differentiation is actually being practiced. The third study was set up to investigate the effects staff development had on helping teachers provide differentiated strategies in the regular classroom.

In the first study, *Regular Classroom Practices With Gifted Students: Results of a National Survey of Classroom Teachers* conducted by Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, and Zhang (1993), it was reported that third and fourth grade teachers make only minor modifications in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. The research and subsequent findings for this report was conducted using a national survey of third and fourth grade teachers across the country. Stratification by region of the country (Northeast, South, North Central, and West) and communities (urban, suburban, and rural) was used. The sampling included teachers from both the public and private sectors of education. A total of 7,314 surveys were mailed, and 3,880 were returned resulting in an overall return rate of approximately 53%. This study was guided by four questions:

1. Do classroom teachers modify instructional practices and curriculum materials to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?
2. Do classroom teachers in various parts of the country and in communities of different size provide different services for gifted students?

3. What instructional practices are used with gifted and talented students in classrooms across the country?
4. Are there differences in the types of regular classroom services provided for gifted students in districts with and without formal gifted programs? (p. x)

The survey questionnaire that was used solicited information in four areas: (1) background of responding teachers, (2) gifted education policies adopted by the teacher's district and school, (3) the general nature of the classroom in which the respondents teach, and (4) the instructional practices they use with average and gifted students. After the surveys were returned, coding procedures were used to prepare the data for statistical analysis. A variety of analyses were performed for each of the areas in the survey.

The results of this study found that of the third and fourth grade teachers who responded to this survey, only minor modifications in the regular curriculum were being utilized to meet the needs of the gifted students in their classroom. This finding was consistent across the board for public schools, private schools, and public schools with high concentrations of minorities. The analyses also showed that when broken down, the results for the different regions of the country and the types of communities were very similar to the results of the whole country. Based on this study, the conclusions indicated that gifted students are receiving few of the services that should be used to address their unique characteristics and academic needs in the elementary school setting.

The second study, *Reading Instruction for Talented Readers: Case Studies Documenting Few Opportunities for Continuous Progress* conducted by Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards, Jacobs, Eckert, Renzulli, and Alexander (2003) also found

that little purposeful or meaningful differentiation was provided in any of the 12 third and seventh grade reading classrooms. Whereas the first study summarized differentiation practices in third and fourth grade classrooms, the second study, dealt specifically with the types of practices used in regular education reading classrooms for gifted readers. Above-grade level books were seldom available for the students, they were not encouraged to select more challenging books from the school library, and talented readers seldom encountered challenging reading material during regular classroom instruction.

The research method used in this study was a qualitative, comparative cross-case study of talented readers in 12 separate classrooms in 11 different schools. The researchers' observations were guided by an established procedure in order to determine the reading practices that occurred for all students, and then specifically what differentiated reading practices were being used for the gifted reader. Classrooms were selected using a variety of criteria including the type of reading program used in the classroom, the use of assessment in the reading program, and a combination of urban and suburban school districts with a range of low to high socio-economic districts.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How was regular reading instruction modified for talented readers in 12 third and seventh grade classrooms?
2. What resources were available and used with talented readers in either the classroom or the school (p. 15)?

In the Reis, et al (2003) multiple case study, observations were used to describe the events, behaviors, and artifacts of the 12 third and seventh grade classrooms used in this study. Multiple visits were made to each of the classrooms and the classroom

teachers were interviewed throughout the study. In the second phase of this study, interviews were also conducted with the librarian/media specialist, reading coordinator, gifted program coordinator, and principal at each of the sites. Appropriate documentation was also provided for the researchers. The goal of this study was “to describe the classroom reading experiences for all readers and then to focus on different reading curriculum or instruction provided for talented readers” (p. ix).

The findings in this study were not encouraging. Out of the 12 classrooms that were part of the study, only three provided some challenge to their gifted readers. It should be noted that the three classrooms that provided some challenge did not differentiate on a regular basis and differentiation was not seen during each of the observations periods. The strategies that were observed in these classrooms included asking an advanced question or two during discussion, gifted readers leading a discussion group, or expanding upon a writing assignment. The other nine classrooms had very limited differentiation instruction. In these classes, the use of some grouping practices was noted, but the curriculum and instruction of these different groups was the same as the regular classroom groups. It was also noted that some groups were further along in the basal series, but no difference in strategies was noted.

Through interviews with the nine teachers where little differentiation was found to be taking place, reasons cited were: no prior training, little support, and minimal professional development in how to provide these services. They also cited that state assessment procedures made it necessary for them to focus their attention on the students who were below grade level. A lack of resources was another reason cited for the lack of differentiation. It should be noted that in all the classrooms, technology was available,

but was not used to provide differentiated instruction. Another key finding was that while there appeared to be an abundance of books available for lower level readers, there was a very limited supply of books available for use by gifted readers.

The third study entitled *The Feasibility of High-end Learning in a Diverse Middle School* conducted by Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan (2005) was a longitudinal study set up to investigate what effects staff development programs designed to provide teachers with differentiation strategies had on their teaching. This study showed that differentiation of instruction and assessment are complex endeavors requiring extended time and concentrated effort to master. Add to these the complex current realities of school such as large class size, limited resource materials, lack of planning time, lack of structures in place to allow collaboration with colleagues, and ever-increasing numbers of teacher responsibilities, and the tasks become even more daunting.

Nine middle schools participated in this research project from three different states; two of the states were located on the East Coast and one was located in the Southwest. Four different school districts in these three states were represented in this study including two small urban school districts, a large suburban school district, and a large urban school district. The schools were each designated as a treatment site: differentiation and assessment, assessment only, or comparison. Originally the study was to follow the same set of teachers in each school over a period of three years. However, there was a high rate of attrition among the teachers and by the conclusion of the study, 76 teachers were involved.

Students were also involved in this study which was initially designed to follow the same set of students over the three-year span across two of the treatment groups, differentiated instruction or differentiated authentic assessment, and one comparison group. Again, there was some student attrition involved. One group of students was followed for two years; the second group participated in the study for three years, and a third group participated only one year in the study.

Researchers used staff development programs that were designed to provide teachers with strategies through which all learners, including gifted, minority, and limited English proficient students could be appropriately served in a middle school environment that was sensitive to the diverse range of academic needs. This was a combination quantitative/qualitative study wherein the quantitative methods were used to determine the effect of interventions on students assigned to teachers who were participating in the project, including achievement, attitudes, self-concept, and specific content areas. The basic question for the qualitative component was “How do middle school teachers and students respond when differentiated instruction and/or differentiated authentic assessment are assigned a major role through staff development initiatives, and why do they respond as they do?” (p. xi). There were several general questions that were used to guide data collection throughout the study.

Data collection for the quantitative side of the study involved teacher questionnaires, student baseline data included ITBS, classroom, self-concept, and attitude questionnaires. Data collection for the qualitative portion of the study included: observations; in-depth interviews of teachers, administrators, and students; focus group

interviews; review of documents; participant narratives; videos; and researcher field journals. A variety of data analyses were done on all sets of data collected.

Conclusions were outlined in regard to the quantitative data and the qualitative data collected in the study. The quantitative side of data collection provided a glimpse into teachers' classrooms, and several conclusions were outlined:

- There appears to be room for improvement in developing teachers' skills in addressing academic diversity in middle school classrooms.
- Teachers make little use of strategies (instructional or structural) that would enable the academic diversity of students to be addressed.
- The influence of accountability through curriculum standards and testing programs appears to negatively affect teachers' willingness to or ability to acknowledge and address the academic diversity of middle school learners. (p. 176)

The researchers stated that generalizations could not be made based on the qualitative findings in this study and outlined their reasoning. Throughout the study, the team of researchers observed only minimal effort being put forth by teachers to address the range of academic diversity found in their classrooms. They believed this was due to two factors--differentiation is a multifaceted strategy for teachers to implement and there was little accountability from the school districts. The findings from this study were based on a small group of teachers who sporadically attempted to differentiate instruction or assessment. When looking at the attempts that were made by teachers, the reader should carefully scrutinize the context they were made in and not endeavor to generalize to a broader context.

The research team compiled a list of recommendations gleaned from this study:

1. Changing teachers' beliefs and practices requires an informed, supportive educational community.
2. Teachers in the midst of changing beliefs and practices require consistent coaching and honest, informed feedback about their efforts.
3. Changing teachers' beliefs and practices requires substantial time.
4. Implementing differentiation benefits from a healthy school environment.
5. Changing teachers' beliefs and practices requires individual and peer reflection.
6. The most significant changes to teachers' beliefs and practices occur when teachers are intrinsically motivated to make these changes.
7. Staff development and coaching efforts should focus on ways of encouraging teachers to utilize pre-existing organizational structures and resources to begin the process of creating a responsive classroom environment.
8. Teachers in the process of changing their beliefs and practices need differentiated coaching.
9. When addressing academic diversity, teachers must recognize students' varied readiness needs.
10. Changing beliefs and practices requires teachers to confront their prior assumptions about teaching and learning.
11. Teachers need support as they attempt to address diverse student needs in a culture of accountability.

The results of these studies indicate that if differentiation is left up to the individual classroom teacher, it will not happen. There appears to be many reasons why differentiation does not occur including pressure to raise scores of the lower students, change in the philosophy of teaching and schooling, lack of support, and limited resources both in terms of collaboration and materials.

The results of these three studies reveal that differentiation is not being consistently used in regular classrooms across the country. The gifted student and/or gifted reader spend the majority of his/her time in classrooms where he/she is not being adequately challenged. The reality is that even when teachers acknowledged the fact that they knew they should do more, they felt helpless to make changes due to the pressures they felt to help students who were struggling.

Summary

The constructivist theory proposes that students build on prior knowledge they bring to the learning experience. Add to this the social aspect of learning and the belief that students learn the most when they are given the opportunity to work in their zone of proximal development and the social constructivist theory comes into place. The transactional theory of reader response believes that students respond to literature based on their own unique set of experiences.

Gifted students and gifted readers are defined in many different ways. Even with the wide range of definitions that have been posited by experts in gifted education, there still remains the fact that this homogeneous group of students have characteristics and needs that must be met in order for them to be adequately challenged and reach their full

potential. In order to meet the needs of the gifted, differentiation is a practical way teachers can assure themselves that they are challenging all students.

Serving gifted students in the reading classroom is the emphasis of this study. After close examination of the practices that make up an effective literacy classroom and the practices used in a differentiated classroom, many similarities arise. Effective literacy practices involve a combination of high quality literature, assessment of students' knowledge and skills, the building of student's prior knowledge, and the use of reader response. When differentiation is added to the effective literacy practices, teachers know that assessment becomes an integral part of the process that they use to ensure they are providing instruction that is appropriate for each student.

However, research points out that even though a differentiated curriculum is essential for students to move beyond their current level of knowledge and remain engaged and motivated to learn, differentiation is not being practiced in the regular classroom. Even when teachers were given instruction in the practice of differentiation, they still struggled with the implementation of it in the classroom. This lack of differentiation in classrooms can have a detrimental effect on gifted students due to the fact that they spend the majority of their time in the regular classroom.

This study was conceptualized to fill a gap in the research on differentiation in a reading classroom. There are two reasons why this study may be beneficial. First, the research shows that gifted students need advanced curriculum and instruction when compared to same age classmates. Second, due to a variety of reasons including a change in the philosophy of teaching from what has been normally accepted, high stakes testing in the era of No Child Left Behind, lack of support from the educational system, time and

resource constraints, we know that differentiation is not happening in the majority of classrooms. This study followed the journey of a fifth grade classroom teacher and the gifted readers in her class as she implemented the practices and strategies that are fundamental to a differentiated classroom. The influence that differentiation had on the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience was documented through the use of an intrinsic case study.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. This study may provide the impetus classroom teachers need to undertake the challenge of differentiating the reading program in their classrooms.

This chapter provides a description of each facet of the research methodology. The information in this chapter is organized in the following sections: research design, research questions, setting of the study, classroom site, classroom teacher, participants, role of the researcher, role of the teacher, selection of the novels/stages, data collection, data analysis, and establishing trustworthiness.

Research Design

A qualitative case study method of design was selected for this study. Creswell (1998) defines case study research as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) outline five features that are present in qualitative research: (1) naturalistic, (2) descriptive, (3) concern with process, (4) inductive, and (5) concern with meaning. Although these features are inherent in qualitative research, they do not appear in equal proportions.

Naturalistic is linked to qualitative research due to the fact that the actual setting of the case cannot be distinguished from the actions that are occurring in that setting. This study is further described as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2000) in that the researcher uses thick, rich description to understand the importance of the case being studied. Stake (2000) states that an intrinsic case study “is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (p. 437).

The use of case study methodology was suitable for this particular case because I was interested in the *process* of implementing differentiation into the classroom. Process will be viewed in two ways, monitoring and causal explanation (Merriam, 1998). In this study I was both a mentor and a participant observer in a fifth grade classroom where differentiation was being implemented. There were numerous discussions between the teacher and myself concerning the progression of differentiation being implemented in the classroom, the students’ reactions to differentiation, and how the issue of time management played a factor when implementing differentiation in a regular classroom. Merriam (1998) would define this as, “...describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment or program has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type, and the like” (p. 33).

In a qualitative research study, the researcher analyzes the data inductively. The researcher looks for themes that emerge from the data that have been collected from different sources and how it is all interconnected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). When conducting a qualitative case study, it is important to remember that the researcher is trying to understand and present the perspective of the participants in the study and not

the perspective of the researcher. This qualitative, intrinsic case study focused on how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience when they were provided with a differentiated reading program in the regular classroom, as well as the fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom.

Research Questions

Several research questions provided the framework for this study. The main impetus for conducting this research was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey to provide a differentiated reading curriculum to not only the gifted readers, but also the class as a whole. The overall question that guided this study was:

How do gifted readers and a fifth grade classroom teacher respond to the implementation of a differentiated reading program?

The following focused subquestions guided the research and data analysis for this study.

1. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking of gifted readers through their written response in response journals?
2. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking expressed by gifted readers in literature circle discussions?
3. In what ways does a differentiated reading program affect gifted readers?

4. How does a fifth grade classroom teacher's beliefs about differentiation change as she increases her knowledge and begins planning, implementing, and reacting to differentiated instruction in the reading program?
5. What impact does the fifth grade classroom teacher observe on the students in her classroom as a result of a differentiated reading program?

Setting of the Study

The setting for this study was a PreK-8 school in a rural Midwest setting. This school district is composed of three small towns with a combined population of approximately 2,500. The school district encompasses approximately 160 square miles in three counties. The elementary and middle school is located in one of the communities and the high school is located approximately three miles north of this community in the country. The enrollment of the PreK-8 grade building as of October 9, 2008 was 465 students of which 429 (92%) were White, 20 (4%) were Hispanic, 6 (1%) were African Americans, 3 (less than 1%) were Asian, 6 (1%) were Native Americans, and 1 (less than 1%) were of multi-ethnicity. There were 148 students (32%) who were in the free and reduced lunch program.

The elementary and middle school building includes a preschool, three sections each of kindergarten through 6th grade, and three sections for each of the 7th and 8th grade classes. There is a band room, music room, art room, computer lab, library, Title I/ Reading Recovery room, In-School-Suspension room, combination lunchroom/ gymnasium, and a second separate gymnasium in the school. Three mobile cart computer labs with 25 laptop computers are also available for student use. Special education services are provided by the local special education cooperative including three

resource rooms for identified special education students, two rooms for speech and language services, and a room for gifted services. An itinerant gifted facilitator provided the gifted services for the identified gifted students in this building. There were 28 identified gifted students in this building. Services for gifted students included a 45-minute pullout session once a week during which the students worked on independent projects based on their interests. Various enrichment opportunities were provided to the gifted students based on individual needs.

Classroom Site

In this school district there are three classrooms of fifth grade students, with an average class size of 20 students in each classroom. The students are in their homeroom for mathematics and reading, and rotate to the other two fifth grade classrooms for social studies, science, and language arts. The fifth grade classroom teachers have the basal reading program from Harcourt Trophies entitled *Distant Voyages* (2005) and approximately 25 different novel sets available for their use. The teachers also incorporate skills instruction and reading strategies into the reading program. They believe it is important for students to be provided time to read in the classroom, as well as outside the classroom.

The selected classroom for this study, Mrs. Cook's fifth grade, is a large sunny room with one wall of windows extending from the ceiling to three feet off the ground. Underneath the windows are bookcases, a small table with two computers for student use, and a desk for both teacher and student use. The classroom also has access to a mobile computer cart that can be checked out for classroom use. There are approximately 250 – 300 books available for students to read in the classroom library. Four large sheets of

paper hang on the wall that the teacher uses as word walls. The teacher categorizes her word walls into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. One bulletin board incorporates posters about the writing process. Several cupboard doors contain small posters with the names of the different story elements written on them. These story elements are part of the reading curriculum that Mrs. Cook teaches during the course of the year. The teacher also has a sheet of paper approximately ten feet long that she uses to add banners containing the various reading strategies that are introduced to the class.

When the research began in late October, the desks were arranged in groups of two desks, sitting side by side, and one group of three all facing the front of the classroom on which the whiteboard was located. A large, wheelchair accessible desk is also part of the classroom since there is a fifth grade student from one of the other sections that is wheelchair bound. This seating arrangement changed several times over the course of the research study as the teacher commented that she liked to reconfigure the students' desks approximately once a month. For example, during the month of December the desks were arranged in a giant Christmas tree shape.

One wall has a white marker board and two small bulletin boards on either side of the marker board, and the LCD is mounted on the ceiling projecting to this wall. The third wall has open-faced lockers for the students to hang their book bags, jackets, and in which to place their books. There are cupboards above these open-faced lockers. The fourth wall has a cupboard about three feet high that runs across the length of this wall. This cupboard allows for plenty of workspace on top as well as storage space for the classroom teacher. The teacher's work area is located at the back of the classroom and

she has a computer desk with a desktop computer and a small table that she uses for her workspace.

Classroom Teacher

The classroom teacher in this study, Mrs. Cook, was chosen based on her willingness to learn more about differentiation. Over the past two years, Mrs. Cook expressed a concern about meeting the needs of gifted students, and has sought out the expertise of this researcher/gifted facilitator in providing additional enrichment and challenge for the high ability students in her classroom in several content areas, including mathematics and spelling.

Mrs. Cook has been a classroom teacher for 22 years. Her student teaching was completed in an inner city school in Kansas City in a program called Cooperative Urban Teacher Education. Her first teaching assignment was in a rural school district in Kansas teaching remedial reading and then she moved to a second grade classroom in that same district. Her second teaching position was also in a rural school district in northeast Kansas where she was a JOM Title V coordinator/tutor working with Native Americans. The second year in this district she moved to a fourth grade classroom. Mrs. Cook commented that this district had over 50% of their students on free and reduced lunches and over 25% of the students were Native Americans. When she relocated to this school district, she began as a part-time kindergarten teacher and then moved to her present teaching position as a fifth grade classroom teacher.

Mrs. Cook has been teaching fifth grade in this district for five years. In fact, some of the students in her classroom are students that she taught as kindergarteners when she first began teaching for this district. Mrs. Cook holds a bachelor's degree in

elementary education and an ESL endorsement. In addition to her classroom duties, she is also responsible for the curriculum of the ESL students in the building. Mrs. Cook is presently working on her master's degree in elementary education.

Mrs. Cook integrates important aspects from various instructional reading approaches and does not focus on one single reading program. She believes a reading program should incorporate a balance of literature skills, reading strategies, and fluency. The challenge is in incorporating all of these aspects into a successful program. Mrs. Cook uses the four-block literacy program (Sigmon, 2002) as a guide in the development of her reading program. Writing is also incorporated in the reading program through the use of response journals and applying the skills and strategies that are taught in the language arts class. She believes it is important for students to understand the difference between "fat" and "skinny" responses and questions. Independent reading, shared reading, and read alouds are important components of the reading program that she has developed.

Mrs. Cook expressed that her greatest joy in teaching reading is assisting her students in developing a love for reading. She said that for those students who already enjoy the experience of reading it is rewarding to work with them and participate in great discussions, but she commented that *the best fulfillment is when I help students who do not enjoy reading discover their own love for reading*. The biggest frustration that she encounters when teaching reading in the classroom is the issue of time management. She believes it is hard to find a balance between teaching the skills and strategies that are necessary for successful reading, providing the appropriate challenge for a wide range of students, and allowing students the time to read and enjoy what they are reading. When

asked about the impact No Child Left Behind has had on her teaching of reading, she commented that it has strengthened and challenged her to become a better reading teacher. Mrs. Cook believes that she has become more proficient at teaching the reading strategies and incorporating those strategies with the skills that need to be taught at the fifth grade level. She also contends that because of the attention to reading strategies and skills, she is able to work with the students to assist them in developing a love for reading by becoming more successful in comprehending what they have read. She was quick to point out that it is also unrealistic to think that all children will be successful by the year 2014 as implied by No Child Left Behind. Mrs. Cook also shared her frustration with the lack of parental support for some students who would benefit from extra help at home.

Mrs. Cook discussed differentiation and how she has attempted to integrate differentiation strategies into her classroom in the past. She views time management as one of the biggest obstacles in trying to incorporate differentiation into her current reading program. Over the past years she stated that she has tried various differentiation strategies in several content areas, but had not established a specific program that she incorporates consistently. She did point out that she has different expectations from students in their response journals and activities based on their ability. In the students' independent reading they are required to read books at a predetermined level based on assessments. However, Mrs. Cook admits that she believes these types of differentiation strategies are quite basic and tend to be geared more to the low ability students.

Participants

Twenty-one students comprised this fifth grade classroom, 12 males and nine females. Mrs. Cook and I discussed the students in the classroom and the characteristics

of gifted readers. Five students participated in all three stages of the research study. From this group of five gifted readers, three were identified gifted students and the remaining two students were jointly chosen by Mrs. Cook and myself based on assessment tests given at the beginning of the year and the students' reading performance during the first month and a half of the school year. The tests that were administered to the fifth grade students included STAR Reading from Renaissance Learning (2009) and STI Assessment from Software Technology, Inc. (2008) given by the local school district. The STI tests were based on the reading standards that would be tested on the state reading assessments given in the spring. Three of the gifted readers in this study were boys and two were girls. All five of the participants were white, middle-class students living in rural Kansas.

David is one of the three identified gifted students in this study. David has an amusing personality, but takes schoolwork quite seriously. He has light brown hair and is your typical average fifth grader. David has one older sister. David performs very well academically in the classroom and has a great deal of confidence in his abilities. Due to this confidence, he sometimes fails to ask questions and as a result will sometimes rush through his schoolwork. He is very organized and serious about his schoolwork, and works hard to get his work completed during the school day so that he will not have homework. David is accelerated in math and is one of a group of five fifth grade students who is working in the sixth grade math curriculum. These five students do not attend a sixth grade math class for instruction, but receive instruction for math from Mrs. Cook, a second fifth grade classroom teacher, and the gifted facilitator/researcher in this study. David took part in a math enrichment group last year and is also one of the students who

participates this year in a math enrichment group that meets once a week for more challenging math.

David likes to talk about the activities with which he is involved and the specific activities in which he has participated over the weekends or after school. David enjoys sports and is a member of a traveling football team, the Jr. Falcons. He is also a member of a basketball team through a local recreation center. David enjoys outdoor activities and specifically mentioned hunting and fishing. David indicated that he downloaded an animation program onto his computer this past summer and he is intrigued by the challenge of designing an animated movie.

Emma is one of the identified gifted students in this classroom. She is mature and intelligent, and displays these attributes in her daily life. However, there is a feisty side to Emma that has really surfaced this year. She has a sense of humor and has been known to play harmless practical jokes on fellow students. Emma has long copper-colored hair and wears glasses. She is neat in her appearance, but is not a flashy dresser. Emma understands the subtleties in life and is not afraid to question things that happen in the classroom. For example, one day the art teacher was filming this particular class for a podcast and Emma wanted to know why their group had been chosen. It should be noted that she does not question authority, but is always looking for the underlying rationale for happenings both in and out of the classroom. Emma is accelerated two years in math and receives her math instruction in a seventh grade math classroom. Due to this change in her schedule, she was not able to participate with her fifth grade peers in PE and music, but instead accompanied sixth grade students to PE and music. Due to this change in scheduling she was approximately 15 minutes late for reading every day. Emma was

very comfortable with this schedule and settled in very well with the older sixth and seventh grade students. Emma's independence and maturity provides the impetus she needs to get herself to and from the various classes without relying on her teachers to remind her where she needed to be.

Emma is responsible for her work and all the other details of her life. Family is very important to her and she talked quite a bit about her younger brother and sister. Emma indicated that her family watches movies as part of their family time together. She also talked about spending time with her grandmother and commented that she had made a quilt with her grandmother's help. Emma began a project in the 2007/2008 school year that involved writing and illustrating a book. As she was writing the story she decided that she would give the book to her little sister. This project continued into the 2008/2009 school year and as she worked on the illustrations she mentioned that she thought her sister would really enjoy the book. She also commented that she loved math and geography.

Gary is not an identified gifted student, but his fourth grade teacher had completed a pre-assessment for gifted services. He and his parents decided against moving forward with the testing so the comprehensive evaluation was not completed. His fourth grade classroom teacher discussed his academic abilities with me and believed he would benefit from enrichment. Gary is one of those students who everyone seems to like. He is quiet but very personable, and has a compassionate side to him. Gary has light brown hair and both he and his younger brother are adopted. His parents value education and place a great emphasis on performing well academically. Mrs. Cook

commented that Gary does well with critical thinking and answering questions concerning what he has read, but at times struggles with vocabulary.

Gary is very social in class and there are instances when he needs to focus more on his work and less on what was happening in the classroom. Occasionally Gary tries to make excuses or blame others for mistakes that he has made. Gary was in the math enrichment group that met last year on a weekly basis and he also participated in the math enrichment group this year. He is a member of the Jr. Falcons football team, a traveling team that plays games every Saturday and practiced once or twice a week in the evening. He also participates in a local basketball group that practices twice a week.

Harris is the second participant who was not an identified gifted student, but both his fourth grade teacher and Mrs. Cook believe that he would benefit from enrichment in reading. He has short light brown hair and is tall and thin. Harris is the older of two brothers and his mother is a kindergarten teacher at this school. Mrs. Cook indicated that he is capable of thinking outside the box and has the ability to ask pertinent questions. Harris was part of the math enrichment group that met once a week for enriched math last year and is also part of the math enrichment group that met on a weekly basis this year. Mrs. Cook stated there are times when he tries to lay the blame on someone else for his own mistakes.

Harris also plays on the traveling football team, the Jr. Falcons, and participates in a local basketball group that practices twice a week. Harris enjoys hunting with his family, but his main passion is reading. His mother commented that there have been instances when the family has gone hunting and he chose to stay in the vehicle and read.

Lydia is the third identified gifted student in the group of gifted readers. She is very talkative and bubbly, and sometimes misses directions because she is visiting with other students. Lydia has a playful and outgoing personality along with a sense of humor. Lydia has long light brown hair and is the older of two children. She has a younger brother who is in the third grade. Situations arise when Lydia is able to just sit and observe an activity that is going on and then quickly provide an answer. For example, an activity in which she participated in the classroom involved setting up toothpicks in a pre-designated pattern and then removing a certain number of toothpicks so that a predetermined number of squares were left. Lydia would simply sit and concentrate on the toothpicks until she was able to remove the correct toothpicks from the design. Mrs. Cook commented that she thinks of Lydia as a thinker who sees the big picture but sometimes misses the details. Although she is a very intelligent and capable student, there are times when she forgets her homework. She works hard and demonstrates a great deal of creativity in various classroom projects. Lydia sets high goals for herself and is not afraid to exceed expectations for a project. Lydia is also accelerated one year in math and is a participant in the group of five students who received sixth grade math instruction. She is also part of the weekly math enrichment group that met both last year and this year.

Lydia enjoys spending time with her family. She commented that in the summer she enjoys playing with her brother and swimming in the family pool. The family also takes a couple of vacations each year to a small island where one of her uncles has a vacation home. One of Lydia's outside interests is playing the piano.

These five students participated throughout the course of the entire research study. Two additional students participated in either one or two stages of the study, but unfortunately were not able to complete all three stages. Due to the fact that neither Donald nor Scott completed the entire research study, the data collected from these two students were not included in the final analysis. For clarification purposes, it should be noted that there may be instances where their names appear in excerpts of transcripts incorporated into this study in the various stages in which they participated.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was one of participant observer. Yin (2003) discusses how the role of participant observer is different from that of an observer in that the researcher openly participates in the various aspects of the setting during the course of the study. I would describe my role as twofold in this study. I was a researcher/mentor when I was collaborating with the classroom teacher in discussing the selection of the novels, setting up the lesson plans, discussing the responses of the students' response journals and literature circle discussions, and providing overall feedback about the differentiation process in the classroom. There were also weekly meetings between Mrs. Cook and I discussed concerns and answered questions. During the course of this research study, Mrs. Cook and I developed an excellent rapport that allowed us to share ideas and concerns that arose during the research period. The classroom teacher appreciated the fact that even though lesson plans were outlined, there was flexibility to those plans.

I also viewed my role as researcher/mentor as a means of support for the classroom teacher as she was managing the logistics of applying differentiation strategies

into the reading program for the entire class. During the course of the research study Mrs. Cook commented about areas of concern or situations that needed to be addressed and she appreciated the opportunity to discuss those situations and brainstorm different approaches with me. Mrs. Cook provided all the instruction for reading strategies and mini-lessons; however, I was responsible for facilitating the group of gifted readers on a daily basis, providing feedback to the participants' response journals, and participating in the gifted readers' literature discussions.

As the facilitator for the group of gifted readers, I met with the participants on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday to outline the reading assignments, answer any questions that the participants had about the reading, facilitate literature circle discussions, and provide feedback to the participants concerning their response journals. I read the response journals and provided written feedback to the participants after each entry was completed. In addition to the written feedback, I also provided encouragement, support, and suggestions for improving and building on the types of responses that were being provided in the response journals.

As the participant observer in this research, I was prepared to lead the literature discussions and model effective participant behaviors during a discussion. Based on the first literature circle discussion, I realized that the participants were able to discuss and listen to each other's opinions and ideas with very little prompting from me. Throughout the research study I would pose questions, offer comments, or probe the participants to provide the reasoning behind their responses. There were several literature circle discussions where it was necessary for me to take a more active role in the discussion.

However, for the majority of the literature circles, the gifted readers were primarily in charge of the discussions.

An application for human-subject exemption from the IRB of the Office of Research Compliance of Kansas State University was submitted for approval and the letter of approval was received for this study (Appendix A). I had previously spoken with both the superintendent of the school district and the PreK-8 building principal last spring about conducting a research study in Mrs. Cook's fifth grade classroom. I received verbal approval from both. On September 11, 2008, I sent an email to the superintendent and the principal advising them as to the status of my proposed research and the principal responded through an email that she had no questions at this time (Appendix B). A consent letter was sent to Mrs. Cook, the classroom teacher, and the parents asking permission for their students to participate in the study (Appendix C), along with the Informed Consent form (Appendix D). All students that participated were assured of their privacy and confidentiality during this study through the use of pseudonyms. I did not anticipate any adverse effects to the students involved in this study because the gifted readers were not assigned additional work, but received assignments that were more appropriate. The gifted readers were provided challenging materials and assignments based on their readiness. This study took place in Mrs. Cook's fifth grade classroom during the regularly scheduled reading block each day. The students did leave the classroom on two separate occasions for their pre and post interviews with the researcher.

Role of the Teacher

Mrs. Cook continued with the regular duties and responsibilities of the reading program. The reading block ran from approximately 10:00 to 11:10 every day. Three to four times a week, Mrs. Cook began the reading block with what she referred to as a short mini-lesson in which she introduced and reviewed specific reading skills and strategies such as text structure, the author's purpose in writing, the use of context clues to aid in decoding unfamiliar vocabulary, and the meaning of prefixes and suffixes and their affect on changing the meaning of base words. These mini-lessons provided students with knowledge they would need for the state reading assessment test. Mrs. Cook varied the types of lessons that she presented. There were instances when the students were asked to complete a worksheet; on some occasions the classroom teacher used the LCD projector to project the lesson onto the whiteboard to aid in the discussion of certain strategies; and there were also opportunities for students to be placed in flexible groupings comprised of three or four students to complete a short activity. The use of varied teaching methods provided students with the necessary skills and strategies required by the state standards without necessitating the use of worksheets for continuous drill and practice. After the mini-lesson was completed, the remainder of the reading block was focused on the literature.

Prior to the inception of this research study, Mrs. Cook had already begun discussing with students the elements that were essential for conducting successful literature circle discussions. The students had previous experience with response journals and differentiating between what the classroom teacher labeled as 'fat' and 'skinny' questions and responses. The students had also been exposed to the concept of sharing

their ideas and opinions without raising their hands, but at the same time learning to be respectful of the other students' opinions and encouraging all students to participate.

Mrs. Cook also stated that she had introduced students to the concept of written response to literature through the use of response journals and said that she had approached this in several different ways. Prior to the beginning of the research, Mrs. Cook had given students a template to use, which enabled them to practice the skills they had previously discussed. Some days the students simply responded to the literature by sharing their ideas, views, and thoughts as they interacted with the text. Her goal was to assist students in understanding that even if they had not realized it previously, their minds were continually thinking during the reading process. Mrs. Cook believed this strategy is one that comes naturally for readers but is challenging to verbalize or to focus on through writing.

Mrs. Cook and I designed the schedule that was followed for the data collection beginning October 27, 2008 and ending February 4, 2009. The schedule that was determined included the continued use of short mini-lessons presented by the classroom teacher followed by students coming together into their various reading groups. Mrs. Cook assigned grades for all students and I, as the researcher/mentor, provided input into the grades that were assigned for each of the five participants in the research group.

Selection of Novels/Stages of Study

There was much consideration and collaboration between the classroom teacher and myself as the literature was selected for this study. Mrs. Cook and I met in August 2008 to begin contemplating possible novels for this study. We met in Mrs. Cook's classroom the week prior to teachers reporting for duty and used the Internet and various

book lists to begin our search for quality literature. Each of us chose several novels that we read individually as possibilities for inclusion in the study. This was an arduous task and involved reflecting upon several criteria that we believed were important when selecting literature that would challenge the gifted readers. Consideration was given to the following criteria:

- Reading level
- Content of the literature
- Vocabulary
- Quality of books/authors determined by national and book author awards
- Issues that encouraged different perspectives to allow for rich discussion

As I read through a number of books from the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 William Allen White (State of Kansas book awards) winners for grades 6 through 8, and previewed the Newbery winners and honor books from the past two years, I discovered the level of these books was usually in the range of fourth to fifth grade reading levels. While these books had excellent stories, I did not believe these books provided a depth of issues that would encourage and incite students to delve deeper into the reading and provide a basis for critical discussion. Mrs. Cook and I spoke several times during the first few weeks of school in the workroom or while walking down the hallways concerning the books we were reading and which ones we thought should be included in the study. The final selection of books was made during the first week of September.

Due to the fact that there have been several strategies outlined that can be incorporated when differentiating a reading program, I decided to set up this research study in three separate stages and incorporate three different methods for differentiation.

- In the first stage of the study the majority of students in the classroom, including the gifted readers, read the same historical fiction novel. A small group of four students who were learning disabled read a separate novel by the same author. The differentiation strategies incorporated into this unit were advanced pacing for the gifted readers with the inclusion of background information concerning the specific time period of the novel through the use of a Webquest.
- The second stage utilized the strategy of providing several historical fiction and nonfiction narrative book choices for the gifted readers as they selected literature based on the Holocaust. The gifted readers also accessed several pre-selected Internet sites to provide background information about this time period.
- In the third stage of the study the gifted readers read a science fiction novel and the remainder of the students in the class chose from three separate novels. The gifted readers were also given access to websites that provided background knowledge about the scientific issue in the selected book.

By using three distinct methods of implementing differentiation into the reading program, Mrs. Cook was introduced to various strategies that she may be able to utilize when planning her differentiated reading units in the future.

The three stages of this study provided differentiated instruction in content, process, and product according to the gifted readers' readiness, interests, and learning profile as described by Tomlinson (1990). Table 3.1 provides a concise outline of differentiation of instruction incorporated in this study.

Table 3.1 Differentiated Instruction

	Content	Process	Product
Student Readiness	Incorporation of nonfiction background information through the use of Webquest and on-line resources Advanced –level themes	Small group instruction Supplementary materials Advanced pacing	Response Journals Literature Circle discussions Writing assignments including rough and final draft
Student Interest	Three separate units of study	Student choice of selected literature	Writing an epilogue to <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Student Learning Profile	Inclusion of both oral and written reader response	Continual feedback in response journals encouraging critical thinking	Providing students the opportunity to respond through two avenues: written and oral response.

Stage One – Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

In the first stage of this study the students read the novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor (1976). This is the story of one African American family that fights to stay together in the face of racist attacks, illness, poverty, and betrayal in the Deep South during the 1930s. Nine-year-old Cassie Logan comes to realize how important land is to their family as she is faced with the reality that whites consider her inferior and that there may be some who would even try to do her and her family harm.

This novel was the 1977 Newbery Medal winner and is one of the novels that the fifth grade already had available for use as a novel study. Although the reading level of this book is listed at 5.7, Mrs. Cook and I decided to use this novel for 17 of the students in the classroom because of the themes and issues involved in this story. Four of the students in the class read the novel *The Friendship* by Mildred D. Taylor (1998). These four students left the classroom every day during the reading block with the special

education teacher. In order to provide more challenge for the gifted readers, historical background information was included as part of this study. The gifted readers researched information about sharecropping, mob violence/Ku Klux Klan, segregation/Jim Crow laws, and lynching through the use of a Webquest (Appendix E). These issues were pertinent to this time period and gave students a deeper knowledge base and understanding for this story.

Table 3.2 provides an overview of daily reading and related activities for the gifted readers during Stage One for the period October 27, 2008 through December 2, 2008.

Table 3.2: Timeline for Stage One - *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Date	Lesson Plan
Monday, 10/27	Students given Webquest for <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> Worked on the first section, Sharecropping
Tuesday, 10/28	Students worked on the second Webquest section, Jim Crow Laws
Wednesday, 10/29	Discussion with students about the first two sections of the Webquest. Students could add information to their sheets
Thursday, 10/30	Students finished the third section of the Webquest entitled Mob Violence/KKK and completed a response journal. Short 10 minute discussion on the information they had learned about sharecropping, mob violence, and Jim Crow Laws.
Friday, 10/30	No School
Monday, 11/3	Students completed the fourth section of the Webquest entitled Lynching. Students also had time to begin reading chapters 1 & 2 of <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> .
Tuesday, 11/4	Students continued reading chapters 1 & 2 and completed their response journal.
Wednesday, 11/5	Literature Circle discussion over chapters 1 & 2 Students wrote in response journal after the discussion
Thursday, 11/6	Students read chapters 3 & 4, completed response journal Researcher began interviewing students
Friday, 11/7	Literature Circle discussion over chapters 3 & 4 Students wrote in response journal after the discussion
Monday, 11/10	Literature discussion over chapters 5 & 6
Tuesday, 11/11	No School

Wednesday, 11/12	Students read chapters 7 & 8 Students wrote in response journals
Thursday, 11/13	Literature Circle discussion over chapters 7 & 8 Response journal after discussion
Friday, 11/14	Students read chapters 9 & 10 Students wrote in response journals
Monday, 11/17	Literature Circle discussion over chapters 9 & 10
Tuesday, 11/18	Students read chapters 11 & 12 Students wrote in response journals
Wednesday, 11/19	Discussed the game of Jeopardy. Gifted readers brainstormed the categories and narrowed it down to 5. Students began writing the questions (which needed to be written in answer format)
Thursday, 11/20	Literature Circle discussion over chapters 11 & 12 (Final discussion)
Friday, 11/21	Gifted readers given the final writing assignment Worked on the jeopardy game
Monday, 11/24	Gifted readers left the room to complete the jeopardy game
Tuesday, 11/25	Gifted readers presented the game of Jeopardy to the rest of the class. The gifted readers were in charge of the game and the rest of the class played. Final writing assignment turned in.
Wednesday, 11/26	No School
Thursday, 11/27	No School
Friday, 11/28	No School
Monday, 12/1	Whole class watched the movie of Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
Tuesday, 12/2	Students were given a compare/contrast written assignment based on the movie by Mrs. Cook

Stage Two – The Holocaust

The second stage of the research study was based on literature concerning the Holocaust period. Mrs. Cook introduced this unit to the whole class. She asked the class what they knew about the Holocaust. Mrs. Cook asked if students believed this still happened today and then went on to talk about diversity in people and how they may be treated disparately. She then asked if she thought there were some students who experienced negative treatment at school based on their interests, looks, or the way they

dressed. The whole class was involved in this discussion and the majority of students contributed to the discussion.

Mrs. Cook then revealed how the Holocaust was one of the saddest historical periods in the world and that the students may see pictures or read things that they may find disturbing. She told the students that they may access pictures of people being discarded like trash, some of the pictures may portray people without clothes, there may be piles of skeletons, or pictures of people who were nothing more than skin and bones. She reminded students that when they viewed pictures of people without any clothes that it was not appropriate to laugh because these people suffered greatly and this time period was a terrible time in history. There were people who were ridiculed and murdered simply because of their religion, but she also believed that the selected literature was appropriate and provided students the opportunity to learn about an important period of history.

Mrs. Cook then dismissed the gifted readers from the rest of the students. I wanted the gifted readers to have background understanding of the Holocaust, so I prepared a short Internet research guide to help them gain knowledge about this time period (Appendix F). I conducted several discussions with the gifted readers concerning their discoveries about the Holocaust time period from the various readings provided in the Internet research.

During this stage, the gifted readers were given a choice of several different literature selections to read. The gifted readers were able to choose from the following selections of literature:

- *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank (1967)

- *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne (2006)
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
- *Yellow Star* by Jennifer Roy (2006)
- *Soldier X* by Don Wulffson (2001)
- *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* by Livia Bitton-Jackson (1999)

I shared short books talks on each of the six novels, and the gifted readers then made their selections. The participants were told that if they read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* or *The Book Thief*, they would only be required to read one selection due to their length and readability. If the participants chose to read *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Yellow Star*, *Soldier X*, or *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, they would be required to read two novels. The remainder of the students in Mrs. Cook's class read *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (1989).

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl is the diary of Anne Frank, who with seven other people spent two years of their life hidden away in a small group of rooms in a warehouse in Amsterdam during World War II. This group of Jews lived in fear of being discovered by the Nazis. Anne wrote her thoughts and feelings and the every day happenings of their time hidden away.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak is the story of Liesel Meminger and how her life is changed when, as she is leaving her brother's graveside, she picks up a copy of *The Grave Digger's Handbook* hidden in the snow. This is the first of many books that Liesel steals throughout the novel. As she lives with a foster family in Germany, Liesel will continue her book stealing from Nazi book burnings and the mayor's wife's library. Liesel learns to read with the help of her accordion-playing foster father and falls in love

with words and books. However, these are dangerous times as Liesel's foster family hides a Jew in their basement and her foster father has a difficult time finding work.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne is the story of two nine-year old boys, Bruno and Shmuel, who become friends during World War II. The remarkable aspect of this friendship is that Bruno is the son of one of the high-ranking officials in the Nazi army who is in charge of the concentration camp, Auschwitz. Shmuel is one of the Jewish boys living in the concentration camp. Due to Bruno's naïve nature, he does not understand the circumstances of his friend's life, and as Shmuel tries to explain to Bruno how things are, Bruno does not comprehend the situation of Shmuel's existence.

Soldier X by Don Wulffson is the story of sixteen-year-old Erik Brandt who is drafted into Hitler's army in 1944. He is sent to the killing fields of the Eastern Front and is witness to unbelievable sights and situations that he never thought possible. When his unit is attacked, he must make a decision to either kill or be killed. He changes his German uniform for a Russian uniform and takes the identity of a Russian soldier who had been killed in battle. This is his story of survival during World War II.

Yellow Star by Jennifer Roy is the free verse story of life in a ghetto during World War II. In 1939, the Germans invaded the town of Lodz, Poland and moved the Jewish population into a small part of the city called a ghetto. During the course of the war there were up to 270,000 Jews who were forced to settle in this small ghetto under impossible conditions. By the end of the war there were only 800 survivors. Of those 800 survivors, only twelve were children, and this is the story of one of those twelve.

I Have Lived a Thousand Years by Livia Bitton-Jackson follows the life of thirteen-year-old Elli Friedmann as she fights for her life in the concentration camp.

When the Nazis invade Hungary, Elli can no longer attend school, have possessions, or talk to her neighbors. Next, she and her family are moved into a ghetto and eventually Elli finds herself in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

After the book talks, the students were asked to write down their first and second choices for books. Two of the participants chose *The Book Thief*, two other participants chose *Soldier X*, one participant chose *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, and one participant chose *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Many of the participants indicated that they wanted to read more than the minimum requirement. They were told that they would be allowed to read as many of the novels as they wanted; however, the minimum requirement had to be met.

Table 3.3 provides an overview of daily reading and related activities for the gifted readers during Stage Two - The Holocaust for the period December 3, 2008 through January 14, 2009.

Table 3.3: Timeline for Stage Two - The Holocaust

Date	Lesson Plan
Wednesday, 12/3	Mrs. Cook introduced the Holocaust Unit Gifted readers begin Internet research
Thursday, 12/4	Gifted readers continue Internet research Group discussion about what they are reading, their feelings, and comments/questions
Friday, 12/5	Continue with Internet research
Monday, 12/8	Finished with Internet research Discussed information the students had read about the "Star of David" Book talk Gifted readers select their books
Tuesday, 12/9	Students read
Wednesday, 12/10	Read the picture book, <i>The Yellow Star</i> Gave examples of entries for the posters entitled Quotes, Interesting Words, and Interesting Word Choices Students read
Thursday, 12/11	Literature Circle discussion

Friday, 12/12	Students read Small discussion with Gary and David about their book
Monday, 12/15	Literature Circle discussion Students read
Tuesday, 12/16	Students read
Wednesday, 12/17	Students read Harris discussed <i>Soldier X</i> with the researcher Emma and Lydia discuss <i>Anne Frank</i> with the researcher
Thursday, 12/18	Literature Circle discussion (only had 30 minutes before the whole class had to leave)
Friday, 12/19	No School – Snow Day
12/20 – 1/2/09	Holiday Break
Monday, 1/5	Short class – 30 minutes Met to discuss assignments for the week
Tuesday, 1/6	Students read Response journal
Wednesday, 1/7	Literature Circle discussion
Thursday, 1/8	Program practice – No reading class
Friday, 1/9	Students read Response journal
Monday, 1/12	No class
Tuesday, 1/13	No class
Wednesday, 1/14	Final Literature Circle discussion of the Holocaust unit

Stage Three – The House of the Scorpion

In the third stage of the study, the gifted readers read the science fiction novel, *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer. This book won a National Book Award in 2002 and was also a Newbery Honor Book in 2003. This particular book was chosen because of the thought-provoking issues such as human cloning, the value of human life, friendship and responsibility, and social structure. This story follows the life of Matt, a clone of Matteo Alacran. Matteo Alacran is a feudal drug lord who has lived for 140 years with the help of transplants from a series of clones. Matt comes to realize the fate that is in store for him and escapes to Aztlan where he is trapped with other lost children.

Matt endures many hardships before he escapes and eventually returns to the empire of Matteo Alacran to take his rightful place as heir and transform the country.

While the group of gifted readers were reading *The House of the Scorpion*, the rest of the students in the class were given three different book selections from which to choose. The three selections were *Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison* by Lois Lenski (1941), *Surviving the Applewhites* by Stephanie S. Tolan (2002), and *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (2000). Mrs. Cook gave a brief talk about each of these three novels to the rest of the class and asked the students to list their first and second choices. She then divided the students into their respective groups. Except for one student, all students received their first or second choice.

Due to the fact that the gifted readers read at a fast pace, this 378-page novel was divided into only four separate sections for discussion. The participants' reading assignments ranged from a minimum of 65 pages to 140 pages for each discussion. All the participants kept up with the reading, and there were actually two students who, as they were nearing the end of the novel, were reading beyond the required reading assignment.

Stage Three began with the gifted readers being challenged to define science fiction. They were told that this book was different from the previous novels they had been reading because the first two stages included novels classified as historical fiction and nonfiction narrative, and this novel was science fiction. The gifted students were then told that this book was about the science issue of cloning and were instructed to access a website and read information about cloning. They then watched a very short

video clip about Dolly, a cloned sheep (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/genetic-science/cloning.htm>).

The pace of reading for this book was more demanding than what was expected in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. The book was handed out on Thursday, January 15, and the first literature discussion was held on Wednesday, January 21 covering the first 142 pages. The participants did not have school on Monday, January 19, and on Tuesday the students were given very little time to read in class due to a practice test for state assessments.

Table 3.4 provides an overview of daily reading and related activities for the gifted readers during Stage Three - *The House of the Scorpion* for the period January 15, 2009 through February 4, 2009.

Table 3.4: Timeline for Stage Three - *The House of the Scorpion*

Date	Lesson Plan
Thursday, 1/15	Introduce The House of the Scorpion Information from website
Friday, 1/16	Students read and write in response journal
Monday, 1/19	No School
Tuesday, 1/20	Practice state assessment test Read and write in response journal
Wednesday, 1/21	Literature Circle discussion pages 1-142
Thursday, 1/22	Students read and write in response journal
Friday, 1/23	Practice state assessment test Read and write in response journal
Monday, 1/26	Literature Circle discussion pages 143-229
Tuesday, 1/27	Read and write in response journal
Wednesday, 1/28	Read and write in response journal
Thursday, 1/29	Literature Circle discussion pages 230-294
Friday, 1/30	Students read and write in response journal
Monday, 2/2	Final discussion
Tuesday, 2/3	Students worked on final questions and Epilogue
Wednesday, 2/4	Final papers turned in

Data Collection

Creswell (1998) states that in case study research, the researcher must use a wide array of data collection in order to provide a detailed, in-depth description of the case being studied. Creswell emphasizes that when using a case study design, the researcher incorporates the widest array of data collection including the four basic types of data: interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials. Stake (2000) believes that with the use of multiple sources and methods of data collection, the researcher can clarify meaning by employing various sources and methods to identify the phenomena being observed. In order to provide the thick, rich description that is an essential part of case study methodology, the data collection included the response journals of the gifted readers, video and audio recordings of literature circle discussions, observations and field notes, digital voice recording of interviews with the gifted readers, and digital voice recording of interviews with the classroom teacher.

Participant Response Journals

Marshall (2000) believes that in order for readers to move from passive reading to more active reading, readers must produce some response to the literature that is being read. Until that response is shared with others it remains hidden inside the reader. Hancock (2008a) contends that it is through the use of response journals that the fleeting thoughts of the reader can be captured. One of the ways the gifted readers shared their interaction with the literature was through the use of response journals. Each of the gifted readers was given a pocket folder with loose-leaf notebook paper inside to record their thoughts, feelings, and ideas as they read the selected text. The gifted readers were

encouraged to think critically and delve deeper into the reading by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating what they read.

I assisted the gifted readers with this type of critical thinking by continually reiterating that they were not to include summaries of what they had read, but instead were to write about what they were thinking or the thoughts that were going through their minds as they were reading the assigned text. During the course of the first novel, the participants were asked to incorporate double entry reflections in which they divided their paper down the center and then wrote down quotes or word choices from the text on the left side of the paper and then wrote their thoughts about those quotes/word choices on the right side. The participants used this method for two reading assignments, but then were instructed to return to free response.

The participants were also encouraged to use post-it notes as they were reading. I explained that the participants should mark the pages that had prompted a thought with a post-it note containing a short comment, continue on with their reading, and then at the end of the assigned reading go back to their post-it notes, reread that section of the text, reflect on what they had read and the short comment, and then articulate their thinking in their journal response. The gifted readers were also encouraged to reflect on how the novel may be relevant to their lives today and what could be gleaned from reading that particular novel.

The participants were asked to write in their journals a minimum of once per reading assignment and time was available in the classroom for them to read and write in their response journals. The amount of time available for reading and responding to the literature varied depending on whether or not a literature circle discussion was scheduled.

On the days when the participants were involved with the literature circle discussions they may have had 5 to 10 minutes to read/write and some days there was no time available after the discussion. The participants had approximately 30 – 35 minutes of work time in class on the days when literature circle discussions were not held. The gifted readers were asked to bring their response journals to the next literature circle discussion to aid the participants in discussing the assigned reading. Both Mrs. Cook and I read through the response journals. The feedback provided to the participants in their response journals (Appendix G) encouraged them to continually build on their critical thinking as they interacted with the text.

Participant Literature Circle Discussions

The literature circle discussions were held in the back of Mrs. Cook's classroom and varied in length from approximately 25 to 45 minutes. The participants and myself sat in a circle, which I believed was conducive to active engagement from all participants in the discussions. These discussions provided opportunities for the participants to express their thoughts and perceptions of the text, but also afforded the participants an opportunity to clarify a portion of the text that hindered their understanding of what they had read.

Both a video recorder and a digital voice recorder were used to record the literature circle discussions. The gifted readers were comfortable with the digital voice recorder because it had been used at the inception of this study whenever the participants met with me to discuss assignments and also when the gifted readers were working on Internet research for the three stages of the study. At the beginning of the first literature circle discussion, I visited with the participants about the video recorder and what was

deemed to be appropriate behavior. Although Daniels (2002) has outlined various roles that students can assume when they participate in the literature circle, this strategy was not incorporated into the literature circle discussions because I believed that the participants needed the freedom of taking on multiple roles, which might lead to developing their critical thinking and deeper comprehension of the text.

In order to assist the gifted readers in generating the types of discussions that involved critical thinking, I assumed a participatory role and encouraged the participants to provide more insight into their responses. It was interesting to note that I came fully prepared with post-it notes in the book to discuss issues that I deemed were important from the reading assignment. However, during the first discussion I actually contributed minimally to the discussion due to the fact that the participants kept initiating the ideas that I had highlighted for discussion. There were even times when one of the participants would disagree with the opinion of another student, and yet he/she was respectful in handling this disagreement. At one point, one of the gifted readers specifically asked one of the other participants, who had contributed very little to the discussion, what his/her feelings were on a certain subject. Over the course of the discussions, there were times when I inserted comments, asked questions, or probed the participants to explain in greater detail their particular perceptions or provide documentation from the text to substantiate their reasoning. For example, the participants were discussing whether or not Daisy Crocker, one of the teachers at the school was white or black. I made the comment, *Miss Crocker – is it possible that she was a black and just accepted the way it was and didn't want to make it worse for herself versus Mrs. Logan who was like you know, I have to stand up for what I believe?* This comment incited the participants to

probe further into their reading. There were instances when I encouraged the participants to provide reasoning for their responses. *Why? What makes you think that? What did you read in the book that makes you think that? I am not saying you are wrong, I just want to know what makes you think that?* At one point in a discussion, one of the participants commented that the character had used a “weird” tone when she talked. I wanted the participant to explain what he meant by this and said, *What do you mean weird tone?* There were several occasions when I took on a more active role in the discussions in order to probe for greater insight into the participants’ perceptions, to actuate discussions that were stagnating, or assist the participants in initiating conversations when the discussion waned.

During Stage Two – The Holocaust, the gifted readers were introduced to a variation of the literature circle discussions that were held during Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. The discussions that were held in the first stage centered on a single novel that all the participants had read. However, the literature circle discussions that were held in the second stage challenged the participants to discuss the Holocaust based on the self-selected novel they were reading at that time. The gifted readers were challenged to look for the overarching themes in their novels and discuss issues that were central to the various novels that were being read. This type of discussion required the gifted readers to analyze and evaluate the differing opinions and views from each of the books selected and then relate these themes to their self-selected literature. The very first discussion in Stage Two – The Holocaust was challenging for the participants. The gifted readers’ uncertainty in how to proceed with this type of discussion was evident as no one volunteered to initiate the discussion.

At that point I began the discussion by asking the participants to reflect on the supposition that there appeared to be some type of secret in each of their books. I asked them to consider what that secret might be in each of their books and how it was manifesting itself on the main characters. This was the first discussion where I assumed a leadership role and the participants regressed to the question – answer format of discussions. The participants provided limited spontaneous responses and instead relied on me to initiate the discussion and probe the participants for their perceptions. It was evident that they were uncertain how to incorporate their perceptions of the text they were reading with the perceptions of the other participants. In the second discussion of Stage Two – The Holocaust, the participants were contributing more details in their responses, however, they still relied on me to initiate the conversations. In order to instill confidence in the participants' ability to lead these discussions, I challenged the participants to reflect on what they knew about this period in history and themes that emerged from the first two discussions and then write two questions that could be incorporated into the next literature circle discussion. The remaining literature circle discussions for Stage Two were noticeably improved when the participants came prepared with questions.

The literature circle discussions in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, reverted back to all participants reading the same science fiction novel. Due to longer reading assignments prior to discussions, there were only four literature circle discussions for this science fiction novel. Over the course of the discussions, I inserted comments, asked questions, or probed the participants to provide reasoning for their perceptions. However, the last three discussions proved to be more challenging for the participants

due to the fact that several of the students had read further than the assigned reading and they were unsure what could be discussed. Several times during these discussions, the participants questioned if a specific incident had occurred in the reading assignment and the group would return to the novel searching for verification as to whether or not the incident in question could be discussed. At one point I questioned the participants as to whether they were finding the discussion to be hard because several of them knew what was going to happen. The two participants who had read beyond the assigned reading agreed that they were afraid to comment for fear of disclosing information to the other participants.

Observations and Field Notes

As a participant observer in this study, I found that observations and field notes provided thick, rich description of the reading activities in the classroom setting. My laptop was open and available for me to record the happenings in the classroom along with reflective thoughts. Whenever I spoke with the group of gifted readers, each of the sessions was audio recorded on a digital voice recorder. The observations included two types: 1) whole-class observations when Mrs. Cook was providing instruction to the entire class; and 2) observations of the gifted readers' literature circle discussions, instructions given to the group of gifted readers, and the periods of time when the participants were engaged in the reading process and responding to the text in their response journals.

Two types of field notes were incorporated throughout the study – *descriptive* field notes that captured the details of what was occurring in the classroom, and *reflective* field notes which were used to express my impressions garnered from the observations,

ideas that were generated during the observations, along with any problems or concerns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It is through the use of descriptive field notes that I could objectively record what was happening during the research study while the reflective field notes were more subjective (Appendix H). Both types of field notes were important to the researcher during data review and analysis. At the conclusion of each day's session, the field notes were reviewed and comments were added, including personal thoughts and reflections. These reflective field notes allowed the opportunity to speculate about what was being learned from the observations and offered an opportunity to determine any areas that needed to be addressed (Appendix I). There were times when the gifted readers would randomly and spontaneously make comments to me that were not actually voiced during the literature circles. Those comments also became part of the field notes.

Participant Interviews

The five participants who completed all three stages of the research study were individually interviewed at the commencement of the study and at the conclusion. The first interview, which was held during the initial week of the study, was used to solicit information concerning the participants' reading habits, both in and outside of the classroom, including favorite books, authors, etc., and their perception of the reading curriculum. In the second interview, which was held at the conclusion of the study, the participants were asked their perceptions of the differentiated reading program. Each of the gifted readers was taken out of the classroom individually to ensure his/her privacy and allowed him/her to respond openly to the questions (Appendix J). These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

In order to appreciate how a differentiated reading program impacted the gifted readers, it was important to allow the participants the opportunity to share their thoughts about how the differentiated reading program may have changed their perceptions about reading and how the increased challenge to their curriculum impacted their desire to delve deeper into the reading experience. The interviews served as a valuable source of information that was used to understand how the gifted readers viewed the process of reading and how their perceptions of reading may or may not have changed based on the added challenge of a differentiated reading program.

Teacher Data Sources

Over the course of the research, Mrs. Cook was interviewed on two separate occasions, weekly meetings were held to discuss lesson plans and any concerns that Mrs. Cook might have, and a reflective journal was requested of Mrs. Cook for her written thoughts and reactions to the study. Through the use of interviews, a researcher is able to gain a better understanding of the participants in the study and how they think and view their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The purpose of interviewing Mrs. Cook was to comprehend her perspective in providing a differentiated reading program to not only the gifted readers in her classroom, but also all readers.

There were two semi-formal interviews with Mrs. Cook. The first interview was held on Monday, October 20, 2008, and the second interview was held on Wednesday, February 4, 2009. A list of questions was prepared for the initial interview (Appendix K), but there was some flexibility with these questions due to the answers and comments by Mrs. Cook as she talked about her teaching experiences, her philosophy and teaching of reading, and her own experiences with differentiation in the classroom. The

interviews with the classroom teacher were digitally recorded and then reviewed and transcribed.

Weekly meetings were held with Mrs. Cook in order to discuss the gifted readers and their handling of additional challenge and any areas of concern that arose. There were many teacher/researcher discussions on how differentiation was affecting the whole class as she began implementing various strategies. She also articulated that the management and record keeping of all the students' work became more difficult when students were involved in a variety of activities. There were times she expressed frustrations, but comments were also made that expressed the success she perceived. A quick review of the lesson plans for the following week was also part of the weekly discussions in order to keep Mrs. Cook apprised of the gifted readers' progress in the reading of their novels. There were instances when the reading time had to be flexible based on the scheduling of Christmas program practice, unpredictable snow days, and practice for state assessment tests. The weekly meetings also provided Mrs. Cook an opportunity to inquire about various strategies that might be more beneficial than what she was already utilizing in the classroom. Even though the goal was to conclude each of these weekly meetings by asking the question, *What did you learn this week that impacted your understanding of differentiation?*, there were times when this question was not specifically asked due to the nature of the discussions Mrs. Cook and I had already had during the meeting.

During the research study, Mrs. Cook was also asked to document her thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the implementation of differentiation into the reading program. She kept a reflective journal throughout the research period and gave the

journal to me at the final meeting. I thought it was important for Mrs. Cook to share her views of this experience throughout this process so that other teachers would be aware of the strengths and challenges of implementing differentiation into a classroom. I viewed the teacher reflective journal as an avenue through which Mrs. Cook was able to express her celebrations and frustrations of the differentiated classroom experience.

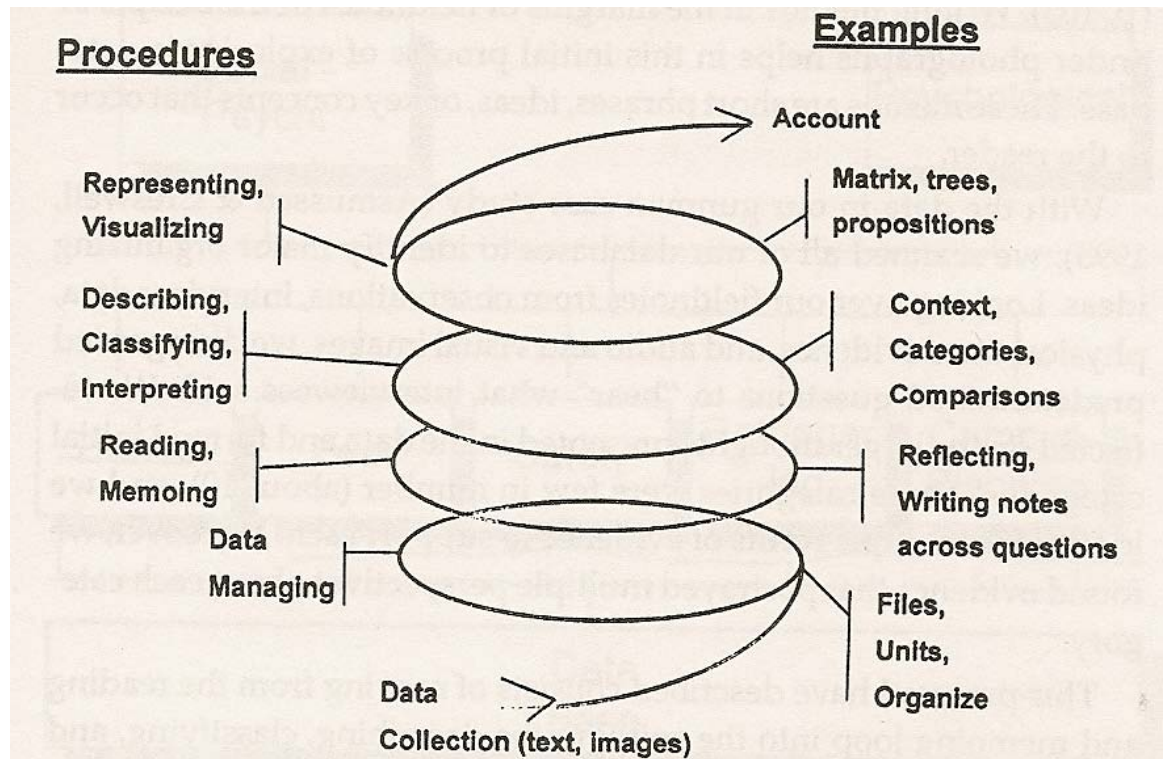
Mrs. Cook was interviewed at the beginning of this study in order to gain a better understanding of her philosophy of teaching reading and her knowledge of differentiation. The participants' interviews afforded information about the gifted readers' perspective on reading and the impact that the added challenge from a differentiated reading program provided to their reading. The gifted readers' response journals were reviewed and photocopied, and then were typed out in order to follow the progress of the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience. The video recordings of the literature circles were reviewed and all discussions were transcribed to determine the quality and critical thinking levels of interactive verbal responses. Through the gathering of this data, I was able to provide a detailed and in-depth description for this intrinsic case study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of reviewing the data that have been collected from the research study, making sense of that data, deciding what was learned from the data, and how that information will be shared with others. Data analysis begins with the inception of data collection and continues until all data have been collected and the researcher has made sense of what was collected. Stake (1995) believes that data analysis gives meaning from the very first impressions a researcher has until the final

compilation is completed. Creswell (1998) uses a data analysis spiral to portray the circling of analysis that is involved in qualitative case study research (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 The Data Analysis Spiral



Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. (p. 143).

In this spiral Creswell labels the different stages of data analysis. The first stage is managing the data into organized units and files for easy access. Next the researcher begins reading through the data and reflecting on that data by writing notes and asking questions about what the data is beginning to show. In the third spiral the researcher begins the process of describing the data in detail, then looking for comparisons begins to classify and interpret the data. In the final stages of data analysis, the researcher makes sense of the data that have been gathered and begins to write a thick, rich description of the findings.

In order to help manage the data that were collected, folders were set up both on my computer and in individual file folders for the various sources of data. The interviews with the classroom teacher and the individual participants were recorded and then transcribed. Both the recordings and the transcripts of those interviews were stored on my personal computer and also in paper form. The response journals of the gifted readers were photocopied and kept in file folders and the response journals were typed and were stored on my personal computer and also in paper form. The observations and field notes were stored on my personal computer as well as paper copies placed in file folders. The literature circle discussions were recorded both on a video recorder and digital voice recorder. All transcripts were transcribed and were stored on my personal computer and were also in paper form.

Stake (1995) states that it is through the collection of multiple sources of data that a detailed description of the case emerges, as does an analysis of themes and assertions about the case by the researcher. People who read this qualitative case study may use the data collection methods of this study for their own professional use or attempt to apply the assertions to other similar cases of gifted readers.

Analysis of Response Journals

The response journals of the participants were photocopied after each written response and were reviewed by the researcher and feedback was given to the participants in the form of comments and questions. I wrote these comments to model and encourage critical thinking that the gifted readers should be incorporating as they wrote in their response journals. At the end of the research study, I reviewed the photocopied response journals several times. I then reviewed information concerning deeper comprehension

and responses as outlined by Hancock (1993), Keene and Zimmermann (2007), and Keene (2008).

I began the process by using post-it notes attached to the participant's journals indicating preliminary thoughts as to coding the response that had been written. I started with Stage One - *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* for each participant and then moved to the responses for Stage Two - The Holocaust, and then Stage Three - *The House of the Scorpion*. Initially twelve categories emerged from the thoughts that were recorded as I read through the response journals. At this point I typed up all the participants' responses and then typed my initial category coding for each response using red text (Appendix L). Discussion with my major professor about the responses, initial perceptions, and the preliminary categories was held. At that point, I made the decision to only code the response journals from the five students who participated in all three stages of the study. I did not include in the data analysis the responses written after the completion of the Webquest or the responses written after the initial two literature discussions of the first stage of the study as these journal responses did not represent the gifted reader's initial response to literature.

I then read through the response journals and recoded with blue text using the initial twelve categories (Appendix M). At this point I sorted and typed up the responses by categories and defined the categories. After careful consideration of the categories and the number of responses in each category, I then redefined and combined two categories into one. The response journals were read a third time and the coding process was typed in orange text (Appendix N). A final review of the categories and the responses in each of those categories precipitated the decision to blend two more of the

categories into one category. I then typed up the final codes in green text (Appendix O) using the final ten categories: (1) Synthesis; (2) Character Affinity; (3) Character Scrutiny; (4) Evaluative Inquiry; (5) Inference; (6) Image Construction; (7) Author's Writing Technique; (8) Prediction; (9) Ambiguity; and (10) Engagement. The definitions of each category, ranking from advanced level critical thinking to basic level critical thinking, and examples of written response from each of the categories are discussed in Chapter 4.

Three response journals, one from each stage of the study, and the final category definitions were given to a peer Ph.D. student for verification of codes. This Ph.D. student has been a classroom teacher for 24 year and the past eight years she has taught language arts at the middle school level. I met with this Ph.D. student to discuss the ten categories of written response that emerged from the data analysis and provided her with examples of responses from each of the categories. The Ph.D. student then took the three response journals with her and recorded her coding for the responses. The verification rate evidenced an 87% agreement rating.

Analysis of Literature Circle Discussions

The literature circle discussions of the gifted readers were recorded on both a video recorder and a digital voice recorder. These recordings were reviewed and transcripts were made for each of the literature circle discussions. Both the video recordings and digital voice recordings were listened to several times during the process of transcribing the literature circle discussions. Repeated listening of these recordings insured that I portrayed as accurate a transcript of the participants' responses in these discussions as possible.

The initial coding for the literature circle discussions was derived from the ten categories of response that were developed from the response journals: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, Evaluative Inquiry, Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, Prediction, Ambiguity, and Engagement. I initially began coding each response in the literature circle discussion transcripts, which were color-coded with orange text (Appendix P). After completing the first transcript, it became apparent that this method would not produce results that would indicate the critical thinking level of discussion in which the participants were involved. I then began contemplating an analytical method that would provide greater insight into the level of discussion.

Instead of focusing on each individual response, I began to analyze a sequence of responses centered on one discussion topic area. At this point, three levels of response were initially developed: (1) Analytical; (2) Probe; and (3) Engagement. The Analytical level was based on the categories of Synthesis and Character Affinity from the categories of written response. The Probe level was based on the categories of Character Scrutiny, Evaluative Inquiry, Inference, and Image Construction. The Engagement level was based on Author's Writing Technique, Prediction, Ambiguity, and Engagement.

I began coding the sequences using these three levels of oral response. The first response in a sequence was coded using blue text. It became apparent that every sequence did not remain at one level. Sequences may begin at one level and then move to a second, third, or even fourth level of response throughout the course of the sequence. In order to assist with coding of sequences, I read the first response in a sequence and coded that response in blue text using the three levels: Analytical, Probe, and

Engagement. I continued reading through the transcript until I determined the response that completed this particular discussion and that final response was coded with red text. After setting up the initial and final responses in a sequence, I evaluated all responses in the sequence to determine any change in the level of oral response. Changes in the level of oral response in the sequence were recorded in orange text next to the response. A summary of the oral response levels was indicated in red text at the conclusion of the sequence (Appendix Q).

Through repeated, intense examination of the transcripts, it was determined that four levels of response were actually emerging. The final four levels of literature circle response to emerge were actually based on the grouping of categories of written response. The four sequence levels of oral response were: (1) Analytical; (2) Probe; (3) Conjecture; and (4) Engagement. The Analytical level of response was derived from the categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, and Evaluative Inquiry. The Probe level was derived from the categories of Image Construction and Character Scrutiny. The Conjecture level was derived from Inference and Prediction categories, and the Engagement Level was derived from the categories of Engagement and Ambiguity. The four levels of response inherent in the literature circles are defined, ranked from analytical to basic thinking, and shared through examples in Chapter 4.

Incorporating these four levels, I read through the transcripts and recoded continuing with the same color of type. To indicate changes that may have resulted from the new levels of coding, I used the same color text but underlined the new coding levels to distinguish any changes (Appendix R). After reading through the transcripts and paying special attention to the similarities in wording for responses at a particular level, I

fine-tuned the definitions for each of the four levels of responses. A final examination of the transcripts was conducted to ascertain any discrepancies in the coding levels of oral response that may have presented itself.

Once again I met with the peer Ph.D. student to discuss coding of the literature circle transcripts. I explained that the coding for the transcripts was based on the categories of written response that were used when she previously coded the response journals, but instead of coding individual responses, she would be examining sequences of response centered around one discussion topic area. She was provided with the explanation of the four levels of literature circle response that had emerged from the data analysis as well as an explanation of multi-tiered sequences of response. Examples of sequences of response from transcripts were then inspected and discussed. In order to assist the Ph.D. student with this coding, I indicated the initial and concluding response in a designated sequence (Appendix S). The verification rate for these three literature circle transcripts was 86%.

Analysis of Observations and Field Notes

At the end of each reading response session, I reviewed the notes from the observation and added any reflective comments and perceptions from that day's session. Comments that were made by the participants outside the regular reading block were also noted. The observation and field notes were read several times and used in conjunction with other data sources to provide the thick, rich description that is a necessary and vital part of providing a detailed description of the research study. Observations and reflections were used to answer/document the overview and subquestions.

Analysis of Participant Interviews

Each of the five participants was interviewed individually at the beginning and at the conclusion of the study. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. As these transcripts were reviewed the data collected from these interviews were used in analyzing the perceptions of the individual participants as they participated in the differentiated reading program and were used to explain/document the overview and subquestions.

Analysis of Teacher Data Sources

Both of Mrs. Cook's interviews prior to and after the study were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then reviewed and analyzed. Through this analysis I described the experiences and ongoing perceptions of Mrs. Cook as differentiation was implemented into the reading program. Mrs. Cook's perceptions of the differentiation process in reading may be important for other teachers as they strive to differentiate their own reading programs. The weekly meetings also provided further collaboration as to the detailed experiences and articulated perceptions of the differentiated reading program through the lens of Mrs. Cook. Each of the weekly meetings revealed Mrs. Cook's evolving thoughts and beliefs about differentiation in the classroom.

Mrs. Cook provided the researcher with her reflective journal at the final meeting/interview on February 4, 2009. This journal provided Mrs. Cook the opportunity to express her thoughts, concerns, celebrations, frustrations, and questions about the differentiation process in her classroom.

Establishing Trustworthiness

It is important that researchers establish trustworthiness in their case study. One way to establish such trustworthiness is through the use of multiple sources and various methods of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Richardson (2000) uses the term *crystallization* to denote the usage of various methods and sources of data collection. Merriam (1998) also proposes several other strategies that researchers should incorporate into their case study to increase trustworthiness. Through the use of *member checks* the researcher takes the data and his/her interpretations back to the participants of the study in order to verify the accuracy. Through the use of *long-term observation*, the researcher gathers data over a period of time, which also helps increase the validity. Asking colleagues to make comments about the researcher's findings is termed *peer review* and is an important method for researchers to incorporate.

Member Checking

Through the use of member checking, researchers can increase the trustworthiness of the research. Yin (2003) proposes that the researcher takes a draft of the study back to the participants for validation. This is not only a courtesy on the part of the researcher, but the participants have the chance to corroborate the facts and evidence that are presented. I met with Mrs. Cook in June 2009 at her home to explain the categories of written response and the levels of literature circle sequence that emerged from the data. I explained to Mrs. Cook the process I had incorporated in order to arrive at these categories. Mrs. Cook reviewed the categories, definitions, and several of the participants' responses and agreed they were indicative of the various levels of critical thinking as outlined by the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* and

the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. In addition, several emails throughout the summer were sent to Mrs. Cook advising her of the progress and my intent to accurately and authentically present her perspective. Mrs. Cook reviewed the final report of this study.

Peer Review

In order to reduce bias in the proposed study and increase the trustworthiness of the research, Merriam (1998) proposed that the researcher employ peer examination or peer review. My major advisor provided assistance in reviewing the analysis of the data throughout the analysis process. A Ph.D. student from the College of Education reviewed the coding of the written responses from the gifted readers' response journals and the coding of the sequence of oral responses from the literature circle discussions. This Ph.D. student has been an elementary teacher for 24 years and for the last eight years has taught language arts at the middle school. An 87% agreement rate was attained from the Ph.D.'s coding of the response journals and an 86% agreement rate was attained from the coding of the literature circle discussions.

Crystallization

Yin (2003) believes a "major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence" (p. 97). Through the use of various sources of data collection the researcher can develop converging lines of inquiry. Richardson (2000) proposes that instead of the term triangulation, the term *crystallization* be used in qualitative case studies. The term crystallization encourages researchers toward a deeper, more complex understanding of the topic. In this study several sources and methods of data collection were used including participant response journals,

participant literature circle discussion, observations and field notes, participant interviews, Mrs. Cook's interviews and weekly meetings, and Mrs. Cook's reflective journal.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

The final strategy that was used to increase the trustworthiness of this research involved spending an extended period of time in the research field. The research study began on October 27, 2008, and ended on February 4, 2009. I was in the classroom on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for the reading block, which ran from approximately 10:00 a.m. to 11:10 a.m. every day. I spent 42 days observing in the classroom for approximately 70 minutes per day. This period of time allowed for the three stages of the research study to be completed. Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* began on Monday, October 27, 2008, and ended on Tuesday, December 2, 2008. Stage Two – *The Holocaust* started on Wednesday, December 3, 2008, and ended on Wednesday, January 14, 2009. Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* began on Thursday, January 15, 2009 and ended on Wednesday, February 4, 2009.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how a differentiated reading curriculum in a fifth grade reading classroom influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve further into the reading process as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey to provide a differentiated reading curriculum to not only the gifted readers but also the class as a whole. In this chapter I have outlined the research methodology, stages of the

study, data collection process, and data analysis methods that were employed during the course of this research, and the strategies used to increase trustworthiness. Table 3.5 aligns the research questions with the data collection artifacts and the data analysis methods that led toward the answers to the research questions. This was an intrinsic qualitative case study and the technique of constant comparison was used for the analysis of data. Through the use of multiple sources of data collection I was able to portray a rich, detailed picture of the findings of the case being studied.

Table 3.5: Data Collection and Analysis

How do gifted readers and a fifth grade classroom teacher respond to the implementation of a differentiated reading program?		
Research Question	Data Collection Sources	Data Analysis
<p><u>SUB-QUESTION</u> How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking of gifted readers through their written response in response journals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom observations/field notes • Response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review observation and field notes • Code and categorize student response in response journals
<p><u>SUB-QUESTION</u> How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking expressed by gifted readers in literature circle discussions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom observations/field notes • Video recording of literature circle discussion group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribe/review video recording of literature circle groups • Review observation and field notes
<p><u>SUB-QUESTION</u> In what ways does a differentiated reading program affect gifted readers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom observations/field notes • Interviews of participants • Weekly meetings • Teacher reflective journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review observation and field notes • Review/transcribe interviews of participants • Review weekly meeting notes • Review teacher reflective journal
<p><u>SUB-QUESTION</u> How does a fifth grade teacher's beliefs about differentiation change as she increases her knowledge and begins planning, implementing, and reacting to differentiated instruction in the reading program?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations/field notes • Interviews with classroom teacher • Teacher reflective journal • Weekly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review observation and field notes • Review/transcribe interviews of classroom teacher • Review teacher reflective journal • Review of field notes from weekly meetings

<u>SUB-QUESTION</u>		
What impact does the fifth grade classroom teacher observe on the students in her classroom as a result of a differentiated reading program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations/field notes • Interviews with classroom teacher • Teacher reflective journal • Weekly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review observation and field notes • Review/transcribe audio recording of interview with classroom teacher • Review teacher reflective journal • Review of field notes from weekly meetings

With the inception of *No Child Left Behind* and high stakes testing, it is a daunting task to provide appropriately challenging instruction for the diverse range of students in the regular classroom, particularly the gifted readers. In fact, teachers must begin to change the teaching methods of the past in which a ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy was employed and begin to search for methods to meet the needs of the diverse student population of today’s classroom through differentiating reading instruction. The intent of this study was to document how a differentiated reading curriculum in a fifth grade reading classroom influenced the gifted readers’ ability to think more critically and delve more deeply into the reading process. The study also intended to document a fifth grade teacher’s journey to provide a differentiated reading curriculum not only for the gifted readers, but also for the class as a whole.

CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS

In this era of accountability in education, the *No Child Left Behind* emphasis has focused on ensuring that all students meet minimum standards in reading and mathematics. While this is a lofty goal, the reality is that many gifted students are left with an education that provides little challenge. Many teachers admit that gifted students are often shortchanged in the classroom, but due to the pressure of mandated testing, educators are overwhelmed with teaching the standards and ensuring that all students achieve the minimum standards as set forth by the state (Gentry, 2006a). This daunting task is further complicated by research that states if teachers want to provide appropriate challenges for all students, then differentiating the curriculum is necessary to provide expectations that help the gifted students develop to their full potential (Tomlinson, 2005; Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

Teachers need support as they incorporate differentiation into their classrooms. The purpose of this study was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriate challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in the classroom. The overall question that guided this study was:

How do gifted readers and a fifth grade classroom teacher respond to the implementation of a differentiated reading curriculum?

This qualitative case study was conducted between October 27, 2008 and February 4, 2009. This study addressed the connection between providing a

differentiated reading curriculum for gifted readers and the influence this had on the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience. Three separate reading and responding stages were incorporated in order to provide challenging curriculum to five gifted readers in the fifth grade classroom. Each of these three stages provided separate strategies for implementing differentiation into the reading curriculum. The researcher examined both the written and oral responses to determine the effect that a differentiated reading curriculum had on the gifted readers' responses in an attempt to answer the first two research subquestions:

1. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking of gifted readers through their written response in response journals?
2. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking expressed by gifted readers in literature circle discussions?

This chapter begins with a detailed description of the ten critical thinking categories of written reader response to literature, supported with indented, italicized participant examples for clarification. In addition, the three stages of the research study are described. The categories of written reader response for each of the five gifted readers in each stage are presented and supported with indented, italicized examples for clarification. Next, a detailed description of the four categorical critical thinking levels of response for the literature circles discussions, supported with indented, italicized participant examples for clarification is presented.

Through the use of observations and interviews, I was provided insight into the perceptions of the gifted readers as they completed the differentiated reading curriculum.

These observations and interviews provided information to answer the third research subquestion:

3. In what ways does a differentiated reading program affect gifted readers?

The final section of this chapter utilizes interviews, weekly meetings, and the reflective journal of the fifth grade classroom teacher, Mrs. Cook, to provide the ideas, thoughts, and reactions of Mrs. Cook as the differentiation strategies were incorporated into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. These sources of data provided information to answer the last two research subquestions:

4. How does a fifth grade classroom teacher's beliefs about differentiation change as she increases her knowledge and begins planning, implementing, and reacting to differentiated instruction in the reading program?
5. What impact does the fifth grade classroom teacher observe on the students in her classroom as a result of a differentiated reading program?

Response Journals

The written responses from the participants' response journals were analyzed inductively to determine commonalities in response to the literature. Hancock's (1993) research study was used as a springboard for initial coding and outlined nine categories of reader response: (1) Understanding; (2) Character Introspection; (3) Predicting Events; (4) Questioning; (5) Character Identification; (6) Character Assessment; (7) Story Involvement; (8) Literary Evaluation; and (9) Reader/Writer Digressions. In addition, critical thinking information gleaned from Keene and Zimmermann (2007) and Keene (2008) also served as a basis for contemplating the types of responses that indicated a deeper understanding of the text by the participants. These critical thinking areas

include: (1) assimilating and adapting information from text and other learning experiences; (2) questioning for clarification and probing for deeper understanding; (3) inferring of ideas; (4) creating sensory images; (5) synthesizing information; and (6) empathizing with the characters, conflicts, or the setting. At this point I did not set up preliminary categories, but instead began reading through the response journals looking for similarities in response.

Through repeated, intense examination of the participants' response journals, categories of response began to emerge. Initially twelve categories were derived from the intense scrutiny of the responses. As I repeatedly examined the responses, it became clear that several categories began to merge together and the distinction between several of the types of responses was becoming blurred.

The final written response journal categories that emerged from all three stages of the study were: (1) Synthesis; (2) Character Affinity; (3) Character Scrutiny; (4) Evaluative Inquiry; (5) Inference; (6) Image Construction; (7) Author's Writing Technique; (8) Prediction; (9) Ambiguity; and (10) Engagement. The Advanced Level of critical thinking included the written response journal categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. The categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction characterized critical thinking at the Intermediate Level. The Basic Level of critical thinking was expressed through responses in the Ambiguity and Engagement categories. Table 4.1 provides an overview of these categories, which are ranked from the Advanced Level to the Intermediate Level to the Basic Level of critical thinking.

Table 4.1 Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking

Category	Definition	Example
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	The reader is able to integrate pieces of information and construct his/her own personal opinion. The reader may incorporate his/her own prior knowledge as a basis for forming this opinion.	After reading about a fifth of <i>Soldier X</i> , I really thought about how badly Jews, homosexuals, and others who weren't in the favor of Adolph Hitler were treated. Sent off to concentration camps and usually killed in some awful way. (<i>Soldier X</i>)
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	The reader has connected to the text on a personal level. The reader may also create a text-to-text relationship between the character of the book with a character in another book, or a text-to-life connection by comparing the action of the text to present-day situations.	They must have been relieved when their dad got home. (I know I would've) I can't imagine what it must've been like to have my dad away for such a long time and not know when he would be back. (<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>)
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	The reader is making judgments about the character's actions in the story. The responses include defining a personality trait of a character and then providing documentation from the text to defend his/her evaluation of the character.	Cassie's mom seems to be smart and a bit laid back because she didn't get angry when she heard about Little Man and Cassie's books. She just calmly listened and without a word, glued the book into place. (<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>)
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	The reader is reflecting on what he/she read and then has questions that go beyond surface issues. The responses in this category indicate that the reader is questioning the actions of the individual characters or requesting an evaluative response.	When the Lost Boys say they found the writing on Matt's foot, what was going on in their minds when they saw it? Did they just think it was a tattoo? Did it occur to them that Matt or even themselves would get in trouble? Apparently, it didn't or they wouldn't of turned him in. (<i>The House of the Scorpion</i>)

Inference (Intermediate Level)	<p>The reader is intently piecing together the information from the story and deductively coming to his/her own conclusion. The reader's response in this category indicates higher-level thinking because he/she applies deductive reasoning in his/her response.</p>	<p>When Mama got fired that really made me think. They must be getting back for shopping in Vicksburg. But firing her isn't that a little too far. (<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>)</p>
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	<p>The reader is able to evoke a vivid image in his/her mind. These images may represent an actual picture in his/her mind or the image may be more of a response to specific language that a character employs.</p>	<p>When Maria and Matt were talking on page 31 it made me feel like they were going to be good friends. They just clicked in my mind. It's good to have some one close in your heart like that. (<i>The House of the Scorpion</i>)</p>
Author's Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	<p>The reader appreciates the author's style of writing. The reader responds to the author's writing with comments indicating their appreciation of a particular section of writing or commenting on a particular word choice.</p>	<p>When she says Margot is such a goody, I like her "quote" that she has enough mischief for the both of them. (<i>Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl</i>)</p>
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	<p>The reader is actively involved in the story and is inclined to predict what he/she thinks will happen in the story. The reader may also pose a question that indicates his/her belief about what they think may happen.</p>	<p>I don't think Lillian Jean is going to tell anybody about the fight because she doesn't want everybody to know her secrets that she told Cassie. (<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>)</p>
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	<p>The reader has some type of uncertainty with the text. The reader may have made an incorrect assumption or inference while/he she was reading the text, but as the reader continues, he/she realizes his/her understanding of the situation was incorrect. The reader may also question the actions of a character or the consequences of a character's actions. Responses may include a reader asking for an explanation of vocabulary that</p>	<p>I've discovered that Death is the narrator of this book. I actually found the answer in the book. (To make a long story short, I found the answer when I was getting my bookmark). I thought it was a person and would be a character in the story. (He kind of was because Liesel's brother died.) I guess I was wrong. (<i>The Book Thief</i>)</p>

	is unfamiliar.	
Engagement (Basic Level)	The reader demonstrates an involvement with the story. The response may be a restatement of a particular fact or incident in the story that incited some emotion from the reader. The response may also indicate a temporary misunderstanding of a particular incident or character and at this point the reader may not even be cognizant of this misunderstanding.	I thought it was sad when Mr. Morrison was talking about how his sister got killed in the fire and he barely made it out. (<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>)

The ten categories of written response that emerged from the analysis of the response journals revealed varying levels of critical thinking by the reader. In order to adequately portray the depth of critical thinking engaged in by the reader, I developed a *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* based on the gifted readers' responses. The categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry signified that an *advanced* level of critical thinking was expressed in the participants' responses. The responses in these four categories indicated the participants' ability to integrate information, make connections with the text on a personal level, form judgments regarding characters and/or their actions, and pose questions that asked for an evaluation.

The categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction revealed that the participants' responses did not raise to the level of advanced critical thinking, but indicated responses that were in advance of basic, surface level thinking. These four levels of response evidenced an *intermediate* level of critical thinking on the part of the participants. The responses in these categories encompassed

deductive reasoning used to generate a conclusion, construction of an image, appreciation of the writing style displayed in the text, and a willingness to make predictions.

The categories of Ambiguity and Engagement indicated that the participants were actively involved in the text but provided minimal evidence of critical thinking. This *basic* level of thinking suggested that the participants were able to process the information gleaned from the text but did not elevate their responses beyond a basic level. Their responses included statements that represented temporary misunderstanding and then a subsequent clarification, unfamiliarity with vocabulary, and expression of emotions that were evoked from the reading.

Detailed descriptions of each of the ten categories of written response including italicized participant examples follow to further clarify the alignment of responses with a specific category. All responses are quoted using the authentic language of the participant. Correct spelling of words follows in parentheses after the misspelled word. The title of the literature to which the participant responded appears in parentheses following each example.

Synthesis

The responses in SYNTHESIS indicate that the reader is able to integrate pieces of information and construct his/her own personal opinion. The reader may incorporate his/her own prior knowledge as a basis for forming this opinion. This type of response indicates an advanced level of critical thinking on the part of the reader. He/she incorporated various pieces of information from the text and then by processing that information elevated his/her thinking to generate one's own independent thinking about the situation.

David: *I can't believe that white people hated blacks so much that they would light them on fire. (I didn't even think that was possible). (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Emma: *She is really happy with her new boyfriend, Harry. I wonder if he is a Jew. If not, he might have to break up with her. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)*

Lydia: *After reading about a fifth of "Soldier X" I really thought about how badly Jews, homosexuals, and others who weren't in favor of Adolph Hitler were treated. Sent off to concentration camps and usually killed in some awful way. (Soldier X)*

Character Affinity

The responses in CHARACTER AFFINITY indicate the reader has connected to the text on a personal level and represent an advanced level of critical thinking. The reader may also create a text-to-text relationship between one of the characters in the text to that of a character in a previously read book. Responses at this level may also indicate that the reader has made a text-to-life connection when he/she compared a character or specific action of the book to a present day situation such as a movie or an incident in their own personal life.

Emma: *I feel like that too sometimes. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Gary: *Last but not least I thought it was odd that El Patron wants to be buried with all his possessions like an ancient pharoh (pharaoh) or king. (The House of the Scorpion)*

Lydia: *I hope her friends who lived through World War 2 read her diary. Including my grandma's friend Margaret. She also passed away, but knew someone who lived death. Someone who knew torture and hunger, and was treated very unfairly. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)*

Character Scrutiny

The responses in CHARACTER SCRUTINY indicate the reader is forming judgments about the character's actions in the story. The responses include defining a particular personality trait of a character and then providing documentation from the text to defend his/her evaluation of the character. The responses may include agreement or disagreement with the actions of the character. Phrases such as "He sounds...", "I agree with...", "I'll tell you why...", or "I don't think..." may be included in the response. Readers who responded at this level are invested in the text and have identified with the character and display advanced level critical thinking.

David: *I agree with Uncle Hammer. He should just not even bother to go get it back. If he's not going to see the value of it, he doesn't deserve it. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Lydia: *Rosa is so mean! She would be in jail, wouldn't she? It seems like it to me, because she has threatened to kill Matt and treated him like a dangerous freak animal (The House of the Scorpion)*

Emma: *While she is in trouble with Nazis, when in hole on 72 she screams. But later on she keeps saying I don't want to die. If she doesn't want to die, screaming isn't the solution. Really how is that going to help? It will give the Nazis a better chance of finding her. (Yellow Star)*

Evaluative Inquiry

The responses in EVALUATIVE INQUIRY indicate the reader is reflecting on the text, which incites a level of questioning beyond surface level issues. The responses in this category indicate that the reader may be challenging the actions of individual characters or may demonstrate reflective thinking and questioning of the text that may lead to an evaluative response. Responses at this advanced level include: “How could...,” “How would you respond?,” “Why would...,” and “Who do you think...”

Harris: *How hard do you think it was for Matt to say good-bye to everybody?*

(The House of the Scorpion)

Harris: *How would you feel if you were a soldier for Hitler? (Soldier X)*

Emma: *“Besides I have something to show you T.J. said.” Is it something BM (Big Mama) would approve of? (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Inference

The responses in INFERENCE indicate the reader is intently piecing together the information from the story and deductively coming to his/her own conclusion. The reader’s response in this category indicates an intermediate level of critical thinking due to the fact that he/she applies deductive reasoning in his/her response, but does not attain a level of critical thinking represented by advanced level critical thinking. The reader’s response may be written as a question in which he/she implies his/her conclusion based on the information read.

Emma: *Page 261 explains our question about the front cover. Lightning (lightning) hit the cotton and this is a scary moment for them. They’re not going to get money for it. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Emma: *Why do they put stuff up on all the walls? If Germans find it they won't have a chance.* (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)

Lydia: *I wonder if Felicia or Tom know about the secret passage. If they did, it seems like they would have suspected them to be in it, and never talked about things like they did!* (The House of the Scorpion)

Image Construction

The responses in IMAGE CONSTRUCTION indicate the reader is able to evoke a vivid image in his/her mind. These images may represent an actual picture in his/her mind or the image may be more of a response to specific language that a character employs. Some of the responses may include direct quotes from the text with an emotional response from the reader. Responses in this category illustrate an intermediate level of critical thinking. Words that may signify this type of response include “I love,” “pretty funny,” or “made me laugh.”

Emma: *When it said Cassie volunteered to sacrifice school and help them but her offer was turned down it cracked me up.* (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Gary: *I thought it was very interesting that the school was so small there (their backs were practically touching the forest outside.* (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Gary: *Dalton and me thought it was pretty funny that all of them were chugging down the desert at 5 mph.* (The House of the Scorpion)

Author's Writing Technique

The responses in AUTHOR'S WRITING TECHNIQUE indicate the reader appreciates the author's style of writing. The reader responds to the author's writing with

comments indicating his/her appreciation of a particular section of writing such as “I think this is a great book...,” or commenting on a particular word choice such as “That is some good description.” The responses elicited in this category represent an intermediate level of critical thinking.

David: *“Engrossed in a mystery.” It sounds good to my ears. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Lydia: *In the chapter called “Blood Wedding” I thought it was kind of odd that El Patron had a heart failure AT the wedding! (The House of the Scorpion)*

Emma: *When she says Margot is such a goody, I like her quote, “that she has enough mischief for the both of them.” (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)*

Prediction

The responses in PREDICTION indicate the reader is actively involved with the text and is inclined to predict what he/she thinks will happen next. The reader may also pose a question that indicates his/her belief about what he/she thinks may happen. Responses may include predictive words such as “I’m hoping,” “I think,” or “I was worried.” Readers who respond in this category demonstrate an intermediate level of critical thinking.

Gary: *I don’t think Lillian Jean is going to tell anybody about the fight because she doesn’t want everybody to know her secrets that she told Cassie. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Gary: *I think Matt will escape the factory. (The House of the Scorpion)*

Lydia: *Matt may have a little bit of a tough situation going on if you know what I mean. (The House of the Scorpion)*

Ambiguity

The responses in AMBIGUITY indicate some type of uncertainty in the mind of the reader. The reader may have made an incorrect assumption or inference while he/she was reading the text, but as the reader continues reading, he/she realizes his/her understanding of the situation was incorrect. The reader may also question the actions of a character or the consequences of a character's actions. Responses may also include a reader asking for an explanation of vocabulary that is unfamiliar. The reader may use words such as "I guess I was wrong," "but I read a littler farther," or "I ran into words that I didn't understand..." A basic level of thinking is exhibited by responses in this category.

Gary: *I thought something bad was going to happen to papa and Mr. Morrison when they went to Strawberry. But nothing happened. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Harris: *I wonder if Steven saw Matt get in the helicopter or if he knew he was getting on? (The House of the Scorpion)*

David: *"Jason whined loudly, growing skittish as the lights approached." What is skittish? (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Engagement

The responses in ENGAGEMENT indicate reader involvement in the story. The reader's response may be a restatement of a particular fact or incident in the story that incited some type of emotion. The response may also indicate a temporary misunderstanding of a particular incident or character. At this point the reader is not even cognizant that he/she has a misunderstanding. The reader may also respond with a

question indicating that he/she is processing the information and is attempting to make sense of what he/she has read. These types of responses represent a basic level of critical thinking. Responses may have words such as “I thought...,” “I learned...,” “I’m glad...,” “I can’t believe...,” or “I hate...”

Gary: *As you know whites (drew a sad face next to the word whites) don’t think blacks are good enough to have bran-new (brand-new) stough (stuff). (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)*

Gary: *I thought it was pretty funny when Rudy left Liesel’s shoes at the mayor’s house. (The Book Thief)*

Emma: *On page 168 it sounds like our future when he’s talking about Atzlan. He says something like, “Back then it was Mexico,...” BACK THEN! I wonder if in so many years Mexico will be Atzlan! CREEPY. (The House of the Scorpion)*

The ten categories of written response indicated a *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* by the participants. This hierarchy included Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry at the Advanced Level of critical thinking. The Intermediate Level of critical thinking was attained by responses in the categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author’s Writing Technique, and Prediction. The Basic Level of response was exhibited in the Ambiguity and Engagement categories. This *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* was incorporated into the analysis of written response to indicate levels of critical thinking achieved by the gifted readers in this study.

Case Study Participants/Response Journals

There were five participants who completed all three stages of this research study: David, Emma, Gary, Harris, and Lydia. David was an engaged and critical reader, but laconic in his written responses. Emma was an engaged and highly inquisitive reader and verbose in her written responses. Gary was a focused surface reader and struggled with his written responses. Harris read at a disengaged and surface level. His written responses indicated a lack of critical thinking. Lydia was a critical and focused reader and thorough in her written responses. In the following sections each of the participants will be discussed individually as a reader and will include their thoughts about reading in general and specifically on the three stages of reading and response journal writing of this research study. A table of responses will outline the number of responses at each level across the three stages of categorical written response for each reader. A summary of these responses will follow the table and examples of the participant's responses will be included in the summary.

David: Voracious Reader and Laconic Responder

David is one of three identified gifted students in this study. When asked about the types of books he enjoys reading, David responded that he appreciated long books because he got more enjoyment out of them, they took longer to read, and he usually found them to be more challenging. He also indicated that he enjoys reading books that are part of a series because he believes that if the first one in the series captures his attention, he will then have several books in the series to read before he has to select another book. David stated that he really enjoyed *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini (2003) and that he also liked the Septimas Heap Series by Angie Sage (2005). He considers

fantasy to be one of his favorite genres but does not consider himself a fan of nonfiction. David articulated his reading habits and stated that there were times he would read only what was required by his teacher, but at other times he would read for long periods. He admitted that he does not read much during the summer.

David indicated that on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 representing “I hate to read” to 10 representing “I love, love, love to read,” that he would rate reading at an 8.5. However, when using the same scale to rate reading as a subject in school, he rated it as a 6. He indicated that he did not have a specific reason for the lower rating, but expressed that reading was not his favorite subject. David stated that he appreciates the time that is spent in the reading period actually reading, but does not relish the worksheets that are part of the reading curriculum.

David enjoyed the fact that during the research study the participants were accorded additional reading time and lengthier reading assignments. He also expressed satisfaction with the selection of novels implemented in this study. After reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* from Stage One, he was very inquisitive as to what the next book selection would be. He indicated that his favorite stage was Stage Two - The Holocaust because he was afforded the opportunity to read more than one book during this stage. He specifically mentioned that he relished reading at his own pace and did not have to stop at predetermined points in the books. David far exceeded the minimum reading requirement during Stage Two: The Holocaust. He read *The Book Thief*, *Soldier X*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. In fact, David read *Soldier X* during the holiday break. David also indicated that Stage Two – The Holocaust, piqued his interest. He mentioned that when he arrived home from school one day, his dad pointed out that there was a

program on television about the Holocaust time period and David immediately ran downstairs to watch. He further indicated that this time in history has become one of his favorite interests.

David was very engrossed during the reading of *The House of the Scorpion*. This novel was 380 pages long and was divided into only four reading assignments. Even with the longer reading assignments, David was always reading ahead and articulated that he was so involved in the story that he wanted to keep reading. During the course of this research study he indicated that he did not read books other than the assigned novels because he was engaged in each of the novels and the pace and length of reading assignments were appreciated.

Although David's strength was in the actual reading aspect of this research study, he admitted that he struggled with writing in the response journals. He viewed himself as an acceptable writer if given a topic about which to write. However, when he was asked to write his reflections and thoughts about what he had read, he indicated that it was difficult. Even though he was not verbose in his writing, his written responses consistently indicated a thorough understanding of the novels and a tendency to analyze the characters and their subsequent actions in the novels.

David's responses indicate that he persistently engaged in advanced critical level thinking. Over half of his responses were in the Advance Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. He had a total of only two responses in the Basic Level Engagement category of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Table 4.2 summarizes David's journal responses for each of the three stages of

the response journal portion of the study according to the categories of response. Both the number of responses and the percentages are included. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4.2 – David’s Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Books	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	4 19%	0	0
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	1 5%	1 6%	4 29%
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	11 52%	0	5 36%
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	1 5%	6 35%	0
Inference (Intermediate Level)	0	1 6%	1 7%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	1 5%	0	0
Author’s Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	1 5%	2 12%	2 14%
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	0	0	0
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	1 5%	6 35%	2 14%
Engagement (Basic Level)	1 5%	1 6%	0
Total Responses	21	17	14

David had a total of 21 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 17 responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust (*The Book Thief*, *Soldier X*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*) and 14 responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* for a total of 52 total written responses. Even though David read three novels for the second stage of the study, he only articulated a total of 14 responses for all three novels in this stage. David had a total of 31% of his responses at the Character Scrutiny level. When looking at the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* categories, 64% of David’s responses were in the Advanced Level response categories: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. Only 21% of the responses were in the Basic Level categories: Ambiguity and Engagement.

Coding of the responses indicated that for Stage One of the study, Character Scrutiny elicited the highest number of responses (52%) and Synthesis elicited the second highest number of responses (19%). David had 5% response rates in the Character Affinity, Evaluative Inquiry, Image Construction, Author’s Writing Technique, Ambiguity, and Engagement categories. David had no responses in either the Inference or Prediction categories.

David had four responses (19%) in the Synthesis category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. His responses in this category indicated that he incorporated advanced level critical thinking as he integrated various pieces of information and then constructed his own opinion.

I’m surprised that the Wallaces shot Mr. Logan because they weren’t giving them business. I knew they could get away with crazy stuff back then, but that’s just insane! It’s like getting away with murder! (Actually, I think they could back

then.) I can't believe no one will do anything about it! It's an outrage! (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

David's responses in the Character Scrutiny category (52%) indicated his involvement with the characters. These responses indicated a willingness to express his opinions or question the actions of the characters.

Cassie's mom seems to be smart and a bit layed (laid) back because she didn't get angry when she heard about Little Man and Cassie's books. She just calmly listened and without a word, glued the book into place. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

They shouldn't 've dug that ditch. One day they're going to get into real trouble for it. What if someone had gotten hurt? They probably wouldn't be laughing then. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

In Stage Two of the study, David had the same number of responses elicited in the Evaluative Inquiry and Ambiguity categories (35%). David's next highest category was the Author's Writing Technique (12%). The categories of Character Affinity, Inference, and Engagement elicited 6% of his responses and he had no responses in the Synthesis, Inference, or Engagement categories.

David had six responses in both the Evaluative Inquiry and Ambiguity categories in Stage Two – The Holocaust. His responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category indicated a deep understanding of not only the three historical fiction novels but also the Holocaust time period itself.

If anyone told you that you were supposed to be excluded and treated badly because your eyes were green or your hair was blond, how would you respond?

With words, silence, or physical? How? (The Book Thief)

If you had no job, would you join the Nazis when they asked you? (The Boy in the Striped Pajamas)

The responses to Stage Three elicited a 36% response rate in the Character Scrutiny category. Once again David demonstrated his engagement with the characters and his perception of their involvement in the story.

I think it was cruel of Tom to show Matt and Maria the clone. It must've been disgusting. But I have to give him credit he's a good thinker. His plan probably worked though. Maria didn't like Matt anymore and possibly never will. (The House of the Scorpion)

There was a 29% response rate in the Character Affinity category. David's responses indicated that he had formed connections between himself and the novel.

It must've hurt to land on broken glass. I've never even come close to that kind of pain. The worst I've had is a splinter. But to have 500+ shards of glass everywhere in your body. It's unimaginable! (The House of the Scorpion)

David had 14% of his responses at Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* in both the Author's Writing Technique and Ambiguity categories. In the Inference category David's responses elicited 7%. There were no responses in the Synthesis, Evaluative Inquiry, Image Construction, Prediction, or Engagement categories.

When comparing levels of response in each stage of the study, David had 19% of his responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, in the Synthesis category.

However, he did not have any responses in the Synthesis category in either Stage Two – The Holocaust or Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. His responses in the Character Affinity category were consistent with Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (5%) and Stage Two – The Holocaust (6%). However, he increased his number of responses in this category in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (29%). The Character Scrutiny category elicited 52% of his responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, no responses in Stage Two – The Holocaust, and a 36% response rate at Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*.

David had 35% of his responses to Stage Two – The Holocaust in the Evaluative Inquiry category, but only one response for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and no responses in this category for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. David had a total of two responses in the Inference category – one at Stage Two – The Holocaust and the second at Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. David had one response in the Image Construction category for all three stages and that response was in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

In the Author's Writing Technique category, David had one response (5%) in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, two responses (12%) in Stage Two – The Holocaust, and two responses (14%) in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. David had no responses in the Prediction category in any of the stages. The responses in the Ambiguity category were 5% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 35% for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 14% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. David only had two responses in the Engagement category – one in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and the second in Stage Two – The Holocaust.

David had 64% of his total responses in the Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry categories (Advanced Level) indicating his ability to respond at a high level of critical thinking. The number of responses that David wrote diminished over the course of the research study. He declined from 21 responses in Stage One to 14 responses in Stage Three. He had 17 responses for Stage Two, but this represented his total responses for the three books that he read for this stage. David was an avid and critical reader whose succinct responses indicated 64% of his responses were in the Advanced Level of critical thinking, 16% of his responses were in the Intermediate Level of critical thinking, and 21% of his responses were in the Basic Level of thinking. David's role as a contributor to the literature circle discussions will be discussed in the Literature Circle section of this chapter.

Emma: Inquisitive Reader and Verbose Responder

Emma is one of three identified gifted students in this research study. When asked her perceptions on reading, Emma said that reading is one of her favorite pastimes and that when she has completed her homework and chores she reads. She indicated that whenever she has free time at night, on the weekends, or in the summer she reads. Emma stated that mysteries were her favorite genre because they made her think about what would happen next and she stated that the story usually involved people with evil motives. However, Emma did indicate that she does not usually read lengthy books because she is afraid that she will forget what happened in the beginning. She said that she also reads classics and that one of her favorite books was *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719/1964). She has also read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868/2000)

and *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells (1895/1978). Emma stated that her favorite author is Jenny Nimmo (2003 - 2007) who writes the *Charlie Bone* series.

Emma said that she would rate reading as a 9 on a scale of 1 to 10. When asked how she would rate the subject of reading using the same 1 to 10 scale, Emma reported that it would be a 7 or 8. Her comment as to why this was lower than reading for pleasure was due to the fact that she did not think they actually read very much during reading class. She believed that many times the reading was either from a textbook or short stories; however, she further commented that she enjoyed when Mrs. Cook read aloud to the class because she read with expression. Emma expressed her displeasure with the writing assignments that were assigned.

Emma stated that she believed the differentiated reading instruction had been beneficial and indicated that all the novels that were read for the three stages of this research study were challenging. She also said, *they were all about things that you have to think about when you write in your response journals*. Emma indicated that the novels were interesting and she commented about the book for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* as being one in which the author had included many sarcastic remarks about the characters and she appreciated the humor that Nancy Farmer had incorporated into her writing. She also believed that Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Stage One) had also included humor in her writing. Emma also commented about the issue of sadness in all the novels and stated, *how people just, they think that they are not suitable for real human life, like Jews and blacks and clones*. Emma further articulated that the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and the novels from The Holocaust – *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Yellow Star* contained the theme of hatred. In *Roll of*

Thunder, Hear My Cry hatred was portrayed between blacks and whites and in the two novels from The Holocaust, hatred was portrayed between Hitler and the Jews.

Stage Two – The Holocaust - was Emma’s favorite because she wanted to read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and that she really loved *Yellow Star*. She also appreciated the research that was incorporated into this unit and admitted that she had been provided with important background knowledge and information concerning the Holocaust. Emma read more than the minimum reading requirement for this stage. She completed both *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Yellow Star*.

Over a month after the research study was finished, Emma informed me that she had received several Nancy Farmer books for her birthday. Nancy Farmer was the author of the novel from Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Emma had communicated in her first interview that she did not like to read long books because she did not think she could remember what had happened in the beginning. Reading *The House of the Scorpion*, which was 380 pages long did not deter Emma from desiring to read several more of Nancy Farmer’s books.

Emma’s journal responses indicated that almost half of her responses were in the bottom two categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*, Engagement and Ambiguity. She only had nine total responses in the top two categories of Synthesis and Character Affinity. Table 4.3 summarizes Emma’s responses to each of the three stages of the response journal portion of the study according to the categories of response. The percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Emma had a total of 68 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 30 responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 24 responses for Stage Three – *The*

House of the Scorpion for a total of 119 responses. She produced the most responses of all the participants in this study. Emma had 26% of her total responses in the Advanced Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* categories: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. She had 48% of her responses at the Basic Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Ambiguity and Engagement.

Table 4.3 – Emma’s Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Books	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	0	4 13%	1 4%
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	1 2%	2 7%	1 4%
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	3 5%	5 17%	3 13%
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	2 3%	5 17%	5 21%
Inference (Intermediate Level)	12 19%	1 3%	1 4%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	3 5%	1 3%	2 8%
Author’s Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	4 6%	2 7%	0
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	2 3%	0	0
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	24 38%	5 17%	9 38%
Engagement (Basic Level)	12 19%	5 17%	2 8%
Total	63	30	24

Coding of the responses indicated that for Stage One of the study, Ambiguity elicited the highest number of responses (38%) and Engagement and Inference elicited the second highest number of responses (19%). Emma derived a 6% response rate in the Author's Writing Technique category and 5% response rate in both Character Scrutiny and Image Construction categories. She produced a 3% response rate in both the Prediction and Evaluative Inquiry categories and 2% of her responses were in the category of Character Affinity. Emma had no responses in the Synthesis category.

Emma had one response in the Character Affinity category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This response indicated that she had formed a connection with one of the character's feelings.

I felt as if the world had turned itself up-down with me in it. – direct quote from the book / I feel like that too sometimes – her response. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Emma had 12 responses (19%) in the Inference category, which indicated her ability to piece together the information from the story and deductively come to a conclusion.

I hope Mr. Simms doesn't find out Jeremy went to the Logans or the Logans or Jeremy might badly pay. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Even though the majority of Emma's responses were in the Engagement and Ambiguity categories, she was very much involved in the story. She was not afraid to pose questions about the events in the story or respond to the character's involvement in the story.

As BM left the room, my eyes popped open and I saw her outline, a rifle in hand. – direct quote from the book / I wonder what was wrong. – her response. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

But it was nice for Cassie to stand up for L.M. (Little Man). (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

In Stage Two of the study Emma read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Yellow Star*. Emma had the same number of responses elicited in the Character Scrutiny, Evaluative Inquiry, Ambiguity, and Engagement categories (17%). Emma also had 13% of her responses in the Synthesis category. The responses in the Synthesis category indicated that she was able to integrate the various pieces of information and then construct an opinion from that information.

She is really happy with her new boyfriend, Harry. I wonder if he is a Jew. If not, he might have to break up with her. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)

Emma's five responses in the Character Scrutiny category for Stage Two – The Holocaust were the most responses rendered in this category across the three stages. Three of the five responses were in response to the novel *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and demonstrated her involvement in Anne Frank's life.

I think Anne is very devious, and she points out some very obvious points. I can prove my point. DEVIOUS: She puts two hard pointy brushes in Dussel's bed. She gets some good laughs over that. OBVIOUS POINT: On page 20 she "points out" that it's a fact that cats "puddles" positively stink. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)

The responses to Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* elicited 38% in the Ambiguity category followed by 21% in the Evaluative Inquiry category. Emma's

responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category indicate that she reflected on the characters in the story and questioned their feelings.

I know that El Patron isn't liked by Celia, Tam Lin, the Alacrans, for many reasons, but why are most other people mad at him? Was it because he's lived to be in his 140 – 150's, or what has gone wrong? From the books description, other than Celia, Tam Lin, etc., it doesn't seem like he's done to many wrong things. Or is it because he's just too powerful? (The House of the Scorpion)

Emma's 38% response rate in the Ambiguity category demonstrated Emma's inquisitive nature as she questioned the conduct of the characters and searched for underlying motives behind their behavior.

Ton-Ton has the same mistakes the other boys have, but Ton-Ton gets the blame for it. Like if Matt says I used to much soap, and Chacho says I folded my blanket wrong, and Flaco says I forgot to say the 9 stupid things they have to say, etc..., then Ton-Ton says I used to much soap. Jorge then tells him to ready the position. Why is it all his fault? (The House of the Scorpion)

When comparing Emma's levels of response in each stage of the study, she had no responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in the Synthesis category. Emma incorporated Synthesis category responses in both the next two stages - 13% response rate elicited for Stage Two – The Holocaust and 4% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Her responses in the Character Affinity category were fairly consistent with Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (2%), Stage Two – The Holocaust (7%), and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, (4%). In the Character Scrutiny category Emma had 5% of her responses for Stage One – *Roll of*

Thunder, Hear My Cry, 17% response rate for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 13% of her responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. As the research study progressed, Emma began to incorporate higher critical thinking into her written responses as evidenced by an increase in the number of responses in the Advanced Level critical thinking categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry categories. Both Stage Two and Stage Three produced a higher number of responses in these four categories than Stage One.

In the Evaluative Inquiry category, 3% of the responses were elicited at Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Her responses in this category increased to 17% for Stage Two – The Holocaust and increased to 21% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The responses elicited in the Inference category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was 19% and were consistent at Stage Two – The Holocaust at 3% and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* at 4%. Emma’s responses in the Image Construction category were 5% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 3% for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 8% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Emma’s increased response rate in the Evaluative Inquiry category provided further documentation that she was beginning to incorporate a higher level of critical thinking into her responses and probing deeper into the text.

Emma had 6% of her responses in the Author’s Writing Technique category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and 7% for Stage Two – The Holocaust. She had no responses in the Author’s Writing Technique category for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Emma had only two responses or 3% in the Prediction category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and no responses in this category for

either Stage Two – The Holocaust or Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. As stated previously, the majority of Emma’s responses were produced in the Ambiguity category. She had a 38% response rate for both Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Her response rate in the Ambiguity category for Stage Two – The Holocaust was 17%. The responses elicited in the Engagement category were fairly consistent in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (19%) and Stage Two – The Holocaust (17%) but decreased to 8% in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Emma consistently had the highest percentage of responses in Ambiguity and Engagement, the Basic Level of thinking for each stage. While these responses indicated an active involvement with the text, the responses provided little documentation of advanced level critical thinking.

Emma had 50% of her total responses in the Ambiguity and Engagement categories indicating that while she was an engaged reader, she was not a highly critical reader. The number of responses that Emma wrote diminished over the course of the research study. Her high of 68 responses for Stage One, decreased to 30 responses for Stage Two and then further decreased to 24 responses for Stage Three. Even though the number of responses declined during the course of the research study, Emma continued to produce more written responses than all the other participants except for one of the participants in Stage Three. Emma’s responses demonstrated her involvement with the text but provided minimal evidence of higher-level critical thinking as indicated by a 26% response rate at the Advanced Level, 24% response rate at the Intermediate Level, and 48% response rate at the Basic Level in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal*

Critical Thinking. Emma's role as a contributor in the literature circle discussions will be discussed in the Literature Circle section of this chapter.

Gary: Engaged Reader and Struggling Responder

Gary is one of two participants who was not an identified gifted student. Gary stated that his favorite genre is fiction and that he does not really enjoy nonfiction because he believed it *gets old kind of* when you read it for a length of time. He said that he normally reads about 30 minutes every day when he gets home from school, not because he is required to read, but because he wants to read. He also reported that he reads on the weekends and in the summer. He described a program at a local public library in which he participated that required the participants to log a total of 24 hours of reading. This reading was not completed at one time, but the participants were instructed to document the length of time that they read. He stated that he completed the challenge of reading for 24 hours. Gary discussed the *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* series by Kathryn Lasky (2003) and voiced his involvement with this particular series, but stated that his favorite book was *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2007). When Gary was queried as to how he would rate reading on a scale of 1 to 10 he indicated a rating between 8 and 9. When asked how he would rate the subject of reading using the same scale, he indicated a rating of 6. Probing of the discrepancy between the two scores revealed his belief that the subject of reading was not interesting. He said that while he enjoyed taking part in the book discussions, he did not appreciate the worksheets that were assigned.

Gary indicated that all three stages of the research study were interesting and informative. When further questioned he stated that he had gained a better understanding

of The Holocaust time period and that Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* -- provided information concerning the issue of cloning. He also said that he had become better educated about the unfair treatment of blacks during the depression years from reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Gary commented that Stage Two – The Holocaust was his favorite stage of the research study. In fact, during the course of this stage, he went to see the movie “Valkyrie,” which depicted one of the assassination attempts made on Hitler during World War II.

Gary stated that he struggled with writing in the response journal, but provided no further explanation. He said that he had written comments on post-it notes as he was reading but found it difficult to transfer that information into his response journal. I perused the post-it notes that Gary had placed in his book for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* and recorded approximately 50 post-it- notes in this book. Further examination of Gary’s post-it-notes revealed that he had not written any comments for the last 100 pages of the novel. When I questioned him about this he stated that he did not want to stop reading and write comments because of his intense involvement with the text and a compelling desire to know the outcome of this book. Even though he utilized the post-it notes while reading, he was unwilling to transfer those fleeting thoughts into his response journal entries.

While Gary expressed his enjoyment with reading and was engaged in the reading process, half of his responses were in the bottom two categories (Basic Level) of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Table 4.4 summarizes Gary’s responses to each of the three stages according to the categories of response. The percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4.4 – Gary’s Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Books	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	4 12%	0	1 4%
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	1 3%	0	4 15%
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	4 12%	5 42%	0
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	0	0	0
Inference (Intermediate Level)	3 9%	0	1 4%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	1 3%	0	1 4%
Author’s Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	0	0	0
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	3 9%	0	8 31%
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	2 6%	2 17%	1 4%
Engagement (Basic Level)	15 45%	5 42%	10 38%
Total	33	12	26

Gary compiled a total of 33 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 12 responses for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and 26 responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Even though Gary read two novels for the second stage of the study, he only produced a total of 12 responses. When examining Gary’s responses based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* categories, 42% of

his responses were produced in the lowest category, Engagement, and 49% of his total responses were in the bottom two categories, Ambiguity and Engagement (Basic Level). Gary rendered 27% of his total responses in the Advanced Level categories: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry.

Coding of the responses indicated that for Stage One of the study, Engagement elicited the highest number of responses (45%) and Character Scrutiny and Synthesis elicited the second highest number of responses (12%). Inference and Prediction categories provided 9% of his response rate and 6% of his responses were in the Ambiguity category. Both Character Affinity and Image Construction elicited 3% of his responses and the categories of Evaluative Inquiry and Author's Writing Technique elicited no responses.

Gary's 45% response rate in the Engagement category revealed that he was actively involved in his reading.

I hate Lillian Jean and her Dad because of how they choose to treat black people.

(Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

I thought it was pretty amazing what Mr. Morrison did to those guys when he almost snapped the guy's back. He broke the other guys arm. (Roll of Thunder,

Hear My Cry)

Even though the majority of Gary's responses were in the Engagement category, he did produce several responses in both the Synthesis and Character Scrutiny categories. These responses indicated that he was able to incorporate higher-level critical thinking into his responses.

I'm actually kind of glad the fire happened not because the Logans might have to sell there land but it saved T.J. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

The bus driver is also mean he runs little black kids off the road when they are walking to school. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

In Stage Two – The Holocaust, Gary had 42% of his responses in the Engagement and Character Scrutiny categories. The only other category that elicited any response was the Ambiguity category (17%). Even though Gary referred to Stage Two as his favorite stage of the study and commented that he had achieved a better understanding of this time in history, he only produced 12 responses. The five responses in the Character Scrutiny category indicated Gary's ability to form a judgment about the characters and incorporated information from the text to support his reasoning.

What stands out to me is that Hans stands up for what he believes in. He does not believe in Hitler's ways or what he believes in. I would yous (use) papa for a roll moddle (role model). (The Book Thief)

Also I like Rudy because he doesn't care if Jesse Owens is black or white he likes him for who he is and what he does. (The Book Thief)

The responses to Stage Three elicited 38% in the Engagement category and 31% in the Prediction category. Once again Gary revealed his engagement with the story, but provided evidence of Basic Level thinking.

I thought it was interesting that Matt taught himself how to play the guitar. (The House of the Scorpion)

I do think Matt is going to see Maria again. I don't know how but I just have a feeling that secretly somehow Matts going to see Maria again. (The House of the Scorpion)

Gary had four responses (15%) in the Character Affinity category. These responses indicated that Gary made connections between a character in the novel and others.

Last but not least I thought is was odd that El Patron wants to be buried with all his possessions, like an ancient pharaoh or king. (The House of the Scorpion)

Gary had 4% of his responses in the Synthesis, Inference, Image Construction, and Ambiguity categories. There were no responses in the Character Scrutiny, Evaluative Inquiry, or Author's Writing Technique categories. This 4% represented only one response at each of those levels.

When comparing levels of responses in each stage of the study, Gary elicited 12% of his responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in the Synthesis category. However, he was unable to produce responses in this category for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and only 4% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. His responses in the Character Affinity category showed one response (3%) for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, no responses for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and four responses (15%) for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. He was consistent in the number of responses in the Character Scrutiny category with four responses (12%) for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and five responses (42%) for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*. There were no responses in this category for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Gary did not have any responses across the three stages in the Evaluative Inquiry category.

Gary produced three responses (9%) in the Inference category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and only one response (4%) for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. There were no responses in this category for Stage Two – The Holocaust. In the Image Construction category Gary had 3% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and 4% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. There were no responses in this category for Stage Two – The Holocaust. Gary generated no responses in the Author’s Writing Technique category across the three stages of this study.

In the Prediction category Gary had 9% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, no responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and he increased to 31% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Responses elicited in the Ambiguity category were 6% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 17% for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 4% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The responses in the Engagement category were fairly consistent across all three stages: Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (45%), Stage Two – The Holocaust (42%), and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (38%).

Gary generated 64% of his total responses in the Prediction, Ambiguity, and Engagement categories evincing an engagement with the reading, but this engagement did not lead to higher-level critical thinking. Gary’s willingness to exceed the minimum requirement for Stage Two – The Holocaust – and reading beyond the required reading assignments for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, indicated his active involvement with the reading selections; but the quantity and level of response evinced his struggle with the written response journals. Gary’s rate of response fluctuated over

the course of the study from a maximum of 33 responses for Stage One, a decrease to 12 responses for Stage Two, and then an increase to 26 responses for Stage Three. Gary's responses demonstrated an engagement with the text but provided minimal evidence of higher-level critical thinking as indicated by his 27% response rate at the Advanced Level, 24% response rate at the Intermediate Level, and 49% response rate at the Basic Level in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Gary's role as a contributor to the literature circle discussions will be discussed in the Literature Circle section of this chapter.

Harris: Surface Reader and Minimal Responder

Harris is one of the two participants in this study who is not an identified gifted student. He is a voracious reader and reported that he spends a lot of time reading, especially when he does not have homework. He said that there are some weekends when all he does is read. One of his favorite authors is Christopher Paolini (2003, 2005, 2008) the author of the *Eragon* series. When Harris was asked to rate reading on a scale of 1 to 10, he indicated a rating of 9. However, when asked to rate the subject of reading, he stated that he would rate it as a 2. When queried as to the discrepancy in the two scores, he commented that he was not interested in the books that were read in class, and writing in the response journal was not a favorite activity. If given the choice he would rather *just read* the books. Further probing concerning the subject of reading resulted in him voicing his displeasure with worksheets, which resulted in homework, and once again he reiterated that he would rather *just read*. Harris commented that when he reads an interesting book he shares the title of the book with three of his friends and encourages them to read it. He said they also recommend books that he should read. It was

interesting to note that Harris stated his preference for *lengthier* books. Further questioning in regards to this preference revealed his belief that if the book had over 150 pages he received higher scores on the AR tests. He also emphasized his ability to visualize what was happening in the text and the extra information provided to him by the author made it easier to pass the AR test. I then asked Harris whether he would read a novel if an AR test was not available and he stated that he would.

I solicited Harris' perception of the reading that was involved in the three stages of this research study and his comment was *pretty easy*. When he was further encouraged to expand on his statement, he stated that the reading assignments were not long enough. I then queried Harris to propose changes in the reading assignments that would have made the reading more difficult. At that point he replied that the reading would have been more challenging if longer reading assignments had been given along with more written assignments. Harris commented that he did not believe the books *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* or *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* were particularly interesting, but did mention that *The House of the Scorpion* was intriguing. It was interesting to note that even though Harris acknowledged that he was not thrilled with the writing assignments or writing in the response journal, he believed that if the group of gifted readers had been given extra writing assignments this would have made the differentiated reading more difficult.

Harris said that his favorite stage was Stage Two – The Holocaust because he is interested in reading about wars. He also commented that the study should have incorporated novels about the outdoors or adventure books involving boys as the main characters. Harris even suggested that reading a novel by Gary Paulson would have

made the study more appealing to him. Harris’ comments revealed that he equated harder to longer reading assignments and additional writing assignments but did not comprehend that reading at a more critical level and looking for a deeper meaning from the text was a factor in providing challenge.

Harris’ responses indicated that 43% were in the Basic Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking, Ambiguity and Engagement*. Harris had only three responses in the highest category of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking, Synthesis*. Table 4.5 summarizes Harris’ responses to each of the three stages according to the categories of written response. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4.5 – Harris’ Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two <i>The Holocaust Books</i>	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	2 7%	0	0
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	4 14%	1 8%	2 10%
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	1 3%	0	1 5%
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	3 10%	5 42%	3 14%
Inference (Intermediate Level)	5 17%	0	3 14%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	0	0	0
Author’s Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	1 3%	1 8%	2 10%

Prediction (Intermediate Level)	0	0	1 5%
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	4 14%	1 8%	7 33%
Engagement (Basic Level)	9 31%	4 33%	2 10%
Total	29	12	21

Harris generated 29 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 12 responses for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and 21 responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* for a total of 62 written responses. Harris read three novels for the second stage of the study but only documented a total of 12 responses. The highest number of responses for Harris across the three stages of the study was in the Engagement category, the lowest category in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. In fact, 51% of his total responses were in the lowest four critical thinking categories (Intermediate and Basic Levels). Harris did not have any responses in the Image Construction category across the three stages.

Coding of the responses indicated that for the first stage of the study, Engagement elicited the highest number of responses (31%) and Inference elicited the second highest number of responses (17%). Harris had 14% response rates in both Character Affinity and Ambiguity categories. The Evaluative Inquiry category revealed a 10% response rate with a 7% response rate in the Synthesis category. Character Scrutiny and Author’s Writing Technique each received 3% of his responses and there were no responses in the Image Construction or Prediction categories.

Harris had two responses in the Synthesis category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. His two responses in this category indicated that he was capable of synthesizing the information he had read.

I guess he got pay back for shooting papa by Mr. Morrison but the payback wasn't really worth it because now they have the Wallaces after them too. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

There were four responses in the Character Affinity category, which indicated his ability to connect with the text on a personal level.

It's amazing that we treated blacks so bad, like giving them very poor books that the whites didn't want any more. I don't think I would be like that. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Harris had only one response in the Character Scrutiny category. There were three responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category, which suggested Harris was involved with the characters and questioned the motives behind the characters' actions.

Bright lights appeared far away from the Avery's house. I was thinking oh- no here come the night men just like Mr. Morrison on Christmas. But why? They already beat T.J. up so why would they do it again. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

There were no responses in the Image Construction or Prediction categories and one response in the Author's Writing Technique category. The four responses in the Ambiguity category indicated that a degree of uncertainty existed in Harris' mind. The nine responses elicited in the Engagement category indicated that he was engaged with the text but did not apply higher critical thinking in his responses.

In Stage Two of the study, Harris had 42% of his responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category. Harris' next highest category was Engagement (33%). The categories of Character Affinity, Author's Writing Technique, and Ambiguity each had an 8% response rate and there were no responses in the Synthesis, Character Scrutiny, Inference, Image Construction, or Prediction categories.

Harris' five responses in the Evaluative Inquiry level indicated that he questioned the actions of characters in the text, but he was also delving deeper into the issues of the Holocaust period in history.

How would u (you) feel if you were a solder (soldier) for Hitler? (Soldier X)

The 33% response rate elicited in the Engagement category indicated a willingness to share his emotions about the text.

Its just eval (evil) to make little kids go to war. (Soldier X)

Harris had one response (8%) in the Character Affinity category when he connected with one detail from the novel.

Hitler ripped peoples tongues out if they spook (spoke) against him. I don't think that's right at all. That's like saying no to your dad and he ripes (rips) your tongue out. That would hurt like crazy. I think that's pretty harsh for speaking against him. Nazis must have been pretty stupid. If Hittler ripped my friends tongue out I think I would be smart anouf (enough) to leave. (Soldier X)

Harris also had one response in the Author's Writing Technique category and in the Ambiguity category.

The responses to Stage Three elicited 33% in the Ambiguity category and a 10% response rate in the Engagement category indicating Harris' surface level reading of the novel and his unwillingness to respond at a higher level of critical thinking.

I'm surprised Maria didn't have an outburst when she herd (heard) about the dog. I thought Tom killed the dog but I guess Felicia killed it. (The House of the Scorpion)

Tom's a clone. I never thought he would be a clone. (The House of the Scorpion)

Harris had 14% of his responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* in both the Evaluative Inquiry and Inference categories. The Character Affinity and Author's Writing Technique categories each elicited a 10% response rate and Character Scrutiny and Prediction categories each elicited a 5% response rate. Once again Harris had no responses in either the Synthesis or Image Construction category. Harris' responses to *The House of the Scorpion* indicated an ability to respond at a high level of critical thinking, but he persisted with a high response rate in the lowest two categories (Basic Level) of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*.

When comparing categories of response in each stage of the study, Harris had 7% of his responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in the Synthesis category. However, he did not have any responses in the Synthesis category in either Stage Two – *The Holocaust* or Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. His responses in the Character Affinity category fluctuated with a maximum 14% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a decrease to 8% for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and then a slight increase to 10% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The number of responses in the Character Scrutiny category were consistent at 3% for Stage One – *Roll*

of Thunder, Hear My Cry and 5% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. He had no responses in this category for Stage Two – The Holocaust.

Harris had a 42% response rate in the Evaluative Inquiry category for Stage Two – The Holocaust, but only a 10% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and a 14% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. In the Inference category, Harris had a 17% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and a 14% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. He had no responses in this category for Stage Two – The Holocaust. There were no responses in the Image Construction category for any of the three stages. In the Author's Writing Technique category Harris had a 3% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, an 8% response rate for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and a 10% response rate for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*.

In the Prediction category Harris had only one response (5%), which was found in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Responses in the Ambiguity category revealed a 14% rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, an 8% rate for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and an increase to 33% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Harris remained consistent with his responses in the Engagement category for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (31%) and Stage Two – The Holocaust (33%), but decreased to 10% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*.

Harris had 27 total responses (43%) in the Engagement and Ambiguity categories (Basic Level) indicating that he was a surface reader and applied very little higher critical thinking to his reading. The number of responses that Harris wrote fluctuated over the course of the study. He generated a maximum of 29 responses for Stage One – *Roll of*

Thunder, Hear My Cry decreased to 12 responses for two novels at Stage Two – *The Holocaust* and then increased to 21 responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Harris' responses denoted evidence of higher levels of critical thinking, but consistently maintained the Basic Level of critical thinking throughout the three stages of the research study as evidenced by his 35% response rate at the Advanced Level, 21% response rate at the Intermediate Level, and 43% response rate at the Basic Level as outlined in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. His role as a contributor to the literature circle discussions will be discussed in the Literature Circle section of this chapter.

Lydia: Minimalist Reader and Insightful Responder

Lydia is the third identified gifted student in the research study. Lydia stated that she prefers to read mysteries and emphatically stated that she does not read fantasy books. Her one concession to avoiding the fantasy genre was that she had read the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (1955/1995) and she designated that series as fantasy. Lydia said that she does not consider herself to be an avid reader due to the fact that she rarely reads more than the requirement set by the classroom teacher. She explained that the only time she reads during the summer is if there is a book that she aspired to read; then she would go ahead and read that particular book over the summer. Lydia's normal activities on the weekends and school breaks do not include reading. When Lydia was asked to rate reading on a scale of 1 to 10, she rated with a score between 8 and 9. She then responded that the subject of reading would receive a rating of 6 or 7. Her perception of the subject of reading was that there was minimal opportunity to actually read during the reading class period. She indicated over the past several years

that the classroom teachers read most of the novels aloud to the class. She also believed there were too many worksheets that students were required to complete. Lydia expressed her opinions regarding the subject of reading and articulated that reading and discussing interesting books were essential elements, but the number of worksheets to be completed should be kept to a minimum.

Lydia did not believe that she had checked out a book from the school library this year because she had several books at home that she planned on reading before they were *too far below her reading level*. She stated that she occasionally goes to the public library to check out books. On the subject of choosing which books to read, Lydia remarked that she read the title of the book and if it was humorous or exciting then she would consider reading it.

When Lydia shared her perceptions concerning the differentiated reading that had been incorporated into the reading curriculum, she appreciated the small group and believed this was important for active participation by all participants. Her favorite stage of the research study was Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. As she expounded on her thoughts concerning this novel, it was interesting to note that even though she admitted she did not really like *The House of the Scorpion* because it was from the science fiction genre, she was drawn into the plot of the novel. In fact, she acknowledged that it was the most interesting novel she had read during the study. In Stage Two – The Holocaust - Lydia started the novel *Soldier X*, but after approximately 60 pages she asked to change books because she was not enjoying the story. I agreed that she had read enough in the novel to make that decision and she indicated her desire to read *Anne*

Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. This was the only book that Lydia completed for Stage Two representing the minimum requirement.

Although the number of journal entries and the types of responses that should be incorporated into the journal entries had been discussed periodically throughout the course of the research study, Lydia continued to inquire about the requirements for the journal entries. She was reminded that her journal entries afforded her the opportunity to share her thoughts and perceptions as she read. Lydia's responses were scattered across the ten categories of response. She generated the highest number of responses in the lowest category of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* – Engagement. Yet the Advanced Level Synthesis category received the second highest number of responses. Lydia's responses indicated active engagement with the reading, but also demonstrated her ability to reflect and articulate at the Advanced Level of critical thinking. Table 4.6 summarizes Lydia's responses to each of the three stages according to the written categories of responses. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Lydia generated 24 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 19 responses for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and 32 responses for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* for a total of 75 written responses. Forty-one percent of Lydia's responses were in the Advanced Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. Responses in the Basic Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*, Ambiguity and Engagement, represented 28% of her total responses.

Table 4.6 – Lydia’s Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Books	Stage Three <i>The House of the</i> <i>Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	2 8%	4 21%	6 19%
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	2 8%	2 11%	0
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	3 13%	2 11%	6 19%
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	0	4 21%	0
Inference (Intermediate Level)	2 8%	0	4 13%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	0	0	1 3%
Author’s Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	4 17%	1 5%	5 16%
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	4 17%	0	2 6%
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	1 4%	4 21%	1 3%
Engagement (Basic Level)	6 25%	2 11%	7 22%
Total	24	19	32

Coding of the responses revealed that for Stage One of the study, Engagement elicited the highest number of responses (25%) and both Author’s Writing Technique and Prediction elicited the second highest number of responses (17%). Lydia had 13% of her responses in the Character Scrutiny category and 8% response in the Synthesis, Character Affinity, and Inference categories. There was a 4% response rate in the Ambiguity

category and no responses in either the Evaluative Inquiry or Image Construction category.

Lydia had two responses (8%) in both the Synthesis and Character Affinity categories for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, which signified her Advanced Level critical thinking. The three responses (13%) elicited in the Character Scrutiny category indicated that Lydia was inclined to make judgments about the characters and provide documentation from the text to solidify her judgments.

I was surprised at how mean/grouchy Stacey is. He sounds like he is being mean/grouchy to Cassie, Christopher John & Little Man, but I think he is being more protective, but showing it through mean/grouchy-ness. E.G.: When TJ made Little Man run into the ditch, and get his clothes dirty, (Little Man's worst pet peeve.), Stacey told TJ to knock it off. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Author's Writing Technique and Prediction categories both received 17% of Lydia's responses and indicated her appreciation of the author's writing style and her confidence in reflecting on the information she had read in order to form predictions.

His door hung sadly from a broken hinge - I think this is figurative language, and I like to think of that door as "sad". (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

I think the Logans will pay for that. Maybe her dad could even go to jail because of Mr. Simms, Lillian Jean's dad. Maybe he will hurt someone in the Logan's family. (Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry)

Lydia's 25% response rate in the Engagement category indicated active engagement with the reading prompting an expression of emotions in regards to the text.

That was mean of T.J., I thought, to tell Stacey that he looked like a fat preacher in his nice new coat. (Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)

Coding of the responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust - indicated the highest number of responses (21%) was generated in the categories of Synthesis, Evaluative Inquiry, and Ambiguity. Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Engagement categories elicited the second highest number of responses (11%). Lydia had a 5% response rate for Author’s Writing Technique and there were no responses precipitated in the Inference, Image Construction, or Prediction categories.

Lydia’s four responses in the Advanced Level Synthesis category for Stage Two – The Holocaust – provided evidence of her competence with integrating information and constructing her personal opinion.

It is amazing to me that three days before she was captured, she wrote the last diary entry of her life. The end of her life. Dead. She knew school, fun, friends, summer, sunshine, worry, hiding, torture, and last, death. She went from being popular at school, had many friends and boyfriends, had fun, played, biked, and had a carefree life, and then went straight to hiding, worrying, hunger, fear, and felt misery, then was captured and killed at a concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)

The four responses that were elicited in the Evaluative Inquiry category evinced Lydia’s deep appreciation for the novel, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, and her genuine sentiments for this period in history.

Do you think the holocaust or at least World War II made a difference on the way Jewish people look at their religion today? (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)

The responses to Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* elicited six responses (19%) in both the Synthesis and Character Scrutiny categories. Lydia demonstrated her engagement with the characters and her judgment concerning their actions, as well as her Advanced Level of critical thinking in constructing opinions based on the integration of information.

Rosa is so mean! She would be in jail, wouldn't she? It seems like it to me, because she has threatened to kill Matt and treated him like a dangerous freak animal. (The House of the Scorpion)

In Part 4, I thought it was awesome when Tam Lin took Matt to the oasis & set him free. He had a very accurate plan. Celia was taken care of because Tam Lin wrote her "eejit number" on her head, saying that she was now an eejit (The House of the Scorpion)

Lydia's five responses (16%) in the Author's Writing Technique category indicated her competency to look at the subtle nuances of the author's writing.

In the chapter called "Blood Wedding." I thought it was kind of odd that El Patron had a heart failure AT the wedding! (The House of the Scorpion)

When comparing levels of response across each stage of the study, Lydia had 8% of her responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in the Synthesis category. She increased her responses in the Synthesis category in the following two stages: Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (21%) response rate and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*

(19%). The responses in the Character Affinity category were fairly consistent for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (8%) and Stage Two – The Holocaust (11%). She had no responses in this category for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*.

Evaluative inquiry responses were only elicited in Stage Two – The Holocaust (21%).

Responses in the Inference category were 8% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and 13% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Lydia had no responses in the Inference category for Stage Two – The Holocaust. In the Image Construction category Lydia had only one response (3%) for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The number of responses in the category of Author's Writing Technique was consistent for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (17%) and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (16%). However, the response rate declined to 5% at Stage Two – The Holocaust.

Lydia's responses for Prediction were 17% for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 6% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, with no responses recorded in Stage Two – The Holocaust. Ambiguity responses were consistent for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (4%) and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (3%), but increased to 21% for Stage Two – The Holocaust. Engagement responses showed a similar pattern; Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (25%) and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (22%), but this time there was a decrease in responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust (11%).

Lydia's 41% response rate for the Advanced Level categories in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry) showcased strength in her highest level of

critical thinking. However, her 28% response rate at the Basic Level, Ambiguity and Engagement categories, revealed that although she had the capacity to think at advanced levels of critical thinking, many of her responses demonstrated the Basic Level of critical thinking. The number of responses that Lydia produced fluctuated throughout the course of the research study. Lydia offered 24 responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, decreased to 19 responses for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and then increased her responses to 32 for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Lydia’s range of responses testified to her insightfulness as a reader. She expressed active involvement with the text, an understanding of subtle nuances, and an advanced level of critical thinking as evidenced by a 41% response rate in the Advanced Level categories, 30% response rate in the Intermediate Level categories, and a 28% response rate in the Basic Level categories as outlined in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Lydia’s role as a contributor to the literature circle discussions will be discussed in the Literature Circle section of this chapter.

Summary of Written Journal Responses

Total responses for all ten response categories across the three stages indicated slightly higher than one third of the responses (36%) elicited were in the Advanced Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry. The Intermediate Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Inference, Image Construction, Author’s Writing Technique, and Prediction evidenced a 24% response rate. The Ambiguity and Engagement categories, the Basic Level categories of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*, netted 40% of total

responses. Table 4.7 summarizes the total responses for each of the three stages according to the ten categories and three critical thinking levels of response. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4.7 Total Written Response Journal Categorical Responses

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Books	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Synthesis (Advanced Level)	12 7%	8 9%	8 7%
Character Affinity (Advanced Level)	9 5%	6 7%	11 9%
Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level)	22 13%	12 13%	15 13%
Evaluative Inquiry (Advanced Level)	6 4%	20 22%	8 7%
Inference (Intermediate Level)	22 13%	2 2%	10 9%
Image Construction (Intermediate Level)	5 3%	1 1%	4 3%
Author's Writing Technique (Intermediate Level)	10 6%	6 7%	9 8%
Prediction (Intermediate Level)	9 5%	0	11 9%
Ambiguity (Basic Level)	32 19%	18 20%	20 17%
Engagement (Basic Level)	43 25%	17 19%	21 18%
Total	170	90	117

There were a total of 170 written responses for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 90 written responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and 117 written responses

for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The breakdown for each category revealed a 7% response rate in the Synthesis and Character Affinity categories, 13% response rate in the Character Scrutiny category, 9% response rate in the Evaluative Inquiry and Inference categories, 3% response rate in the Image Construction category, 7% response rate in the Author’s Writing Technique category, 5% response rate in the Prediction category, 19% response rate in the Ambiguity category, and a 21% response rate in the Engagement Category. Based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*, 36% of the responses were at the Advanced Level, 25% of the responses were at the Intermediate Level, and 40% of the responses were at the Basic Level of critical thinking.

In the following sections, the coding of the number of total responses for all three stages will be discussed. The categories are listed in rank order from the category receiving the highest number of responses to the category receiving the fewest number of responses. Following the ranking of categories, examples of responses are provided for each of the Advanced Level critical thinking categories: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry.

Stage One – Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Coding of the responses for Stage One of the study revealed the highest number of responses was categorized in the Engagement category (25%) – the Basic Level of critical thinking. The second highest category was the Ambiguity category (19%) – the second lowest level of critical thinking. Character Scrutiny and Inference categories were both 13%. Synthesis was the next category with a 7% response rate, followed by Author’s Writing Technique category at 6%, and Character Affinity and Prediction

categories both receiving 5%. The Evaluative Inquiry category had a response rate of 4% and the lowest category was the Image Construction category with 3%.

There were a total of 12 responses from all five readers in the Synthesis category. The responses at this level demonstrated the participants' ability to synthesize information and construct their own opinion at an Advanced Level of critical thinking.

David: *I'm surprised that the Wallaces shot Mr. Logan because they weren't giving them business. I knew they could get away with crazy stuff back then, but that's just insane! It's like getting away with murder! (Actually, I think they could back then.) I can't believe no one will do anything about it! It's an outrage!*

Gary: *I'm actually kind of glad the fire happened not because the Logans might have to sell there land but it saved T.J.*

The seven responses in the Character Affinity category also revealed advanced connections that the participants had developed with the text. The connection may have been a text-to-text relationship, a text-to-self relationship, or even a text-to-world relationship.

Emma: *"I felt as if the world had turned itself up-down with me in it." / I feel like that too sometimes.*

Harris: *It's amazing that we treated blacks so bad, like giving them very poor book that the whites didn't want any more. I don't think I would be like that.*

There were 22 responses in the Character Scrutiny category. The responses at this Advanced Level evidenced the participants' involvement with the characters. Participants expressed their opinion, questioned a character's action, or even defined a

personality trait of a character and then provided documentation from the text to support their position.

Emma: *If papa knew what was happening I bet he wouldn't whip them, or not as much. Please don't papa.*

Lydia: *I was also glad that Christopher John and Little Man finally spoke up and told T.J. that they were not his little buddies. It seemed to me that the anger shown at their talk to T.J. had been building up inside of them and got larger each time he called them "my buddy, here."*

There were a total of six responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category. The responses revealed that the participants were reflecting on their reading and were probing deeper into the meaning of the text.

Emma: *Why would Cassie change her mind? The way I see it we all got to do what we gotta do.*

The top four Advanced Level categories in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry) revealed that the five readers demonstrated an Advanced Level of critical thinking with a combined response rate of 29%. The readers' responses were indicative of synthesizing information to construct opinions, connecting with the text on a personal level, forming judgments about characters' actions based on documentation from the text, and reflecting on the text in order to determine the reasons characters chose to act in a certain manner. Twenty-seven percent of the responses evidenced an Intermediate Level of critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Responses in these four categories (Inference, Image

Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction) provided evidence that the participants used deductive reasoning to reach a conclusion, constructed a vivid image in their minds based on wording in the text, appreciated the author's writing style, and were capable of making predictions due to an active involvement with the text. The 44% response rate at the Basic Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Ambiguity and Engagement) indicated that the participants were actively involved with the text. Responses in these two categories also pointed to an uncertainty in the participants' minds as they interacted with the text and an engagement with the text, which evoked strong feelings from the readers.

Stage Two – The Holocaust

Coding of the responses for Stage Two of the study revealed the highest number of responses was documented in the Evaluative Inquiry category (Advanced Level critical thinking) with a response rate of 22% followed by the Ambiguity category (Basic Level critical thinking) with 20%. There was a 19% rate of responses in the Engagement category (Basic Level) and a 13% rate of response in the Character Scrutiny category (Advanced Level). Synthesis had a 9% response rate and Character Affinity had a 7% response rate (both Advanced Level). Author's Writing Technique (Intermediate Level) also produced a 7% response rate. Inference (2%), Image Construction (1%), and Prediction (0%) were all categories revealing Intermediate Level critical thinking.

The eight responses in the Synthesis category indicated that the participants were able to take the information they had read, synthesize it, and then construct an opinion.

Emma: *You know how we are having good times now and in our discussion we are trying to picture how it was back in those bad times. Well she is in bad times*

and they are trying to picture good times. That's the opposite. Funny. As Olivia would say Ho, Ho, Hee, Hee, Ha, Ha. (Yellow Star)

Lydia: *I think that no matter what was currently going on in the world that if you were under such conditions you would be given some sort of help. You just don't see or hear that any more. Nobody wants to live in that sort of condition, or is forced to live in that sort of condition. Interestingly enough, they were not in the worst condition they could be living in though, they could be living in a concentration camp. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)*

There were a total of six responses in the Character Affinity category. Responses from the participants signified a connection with the text on a personal level and were interjecting what they perceived would have been their actions in a particular situation.

David: *Bruno must've been very unhappy when he had to move to "Out-wit" (Aushwitz), I know I would've been. Really, if you had to choose between a huge house, quietish city, and banister to slide on or a smaller house, no kids to play with, and no sliding banister, which would you choose? I'd think the first choice. (The Boy in the Striped Pajamas)*

Harris: *Hitler ripped peoples tongues out if they spook (spoke) against him. I don't think that's right at all. That's like saying no to your dad and he ripes (rips) your tongue out. That would hurt like crazy. I think that's pretty harsh for speaking against him. Nazis must have been pretty stupid. If Hitler ripped my friends tongue out I think I would be smart anouf (enough) to leave. (Soldier X)*

Character Scrutiny had a total of 12 responses. The participants connected with the characters in the historical and narrative nonfiction novels and constructed judgments about their actions.

Gary: *So far in Soldier X I don't think Erik likes it one bit. I think he hated them when he shot at the Russians not because he was a German but, because he was born in Russia and his mom and dad were Russian. (Soldier X)*

Emma: *Mrs. Van Daan seems mean when she says that she would never have Anne as a daughter. Anne wouldn't want to have her as a mom. Mrs. Van Daan didn't think about if she wants to marry Mr. Frank Anne would be her daughter. (Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl)*

The Evaluative Inquiry category had a total of 20 responses. These responses revealed the connection that the participants had formed with the characters in the novels and questioned their own reactions if they had been in that situation. Many of their responses revealed a probing of the text resulting in evaluative thinking.

David: *Why do you think that with as many Jews as there were, they didn't try to fight back? (The Book Thief)*

Harris: *If you were a Jew back then and look like a non-Jew would you wear the Star of David or not? (Soldier X)*

The top four Advanced Level categories in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry) revealed that the five participants had demonstrated advanced levels of critical thinking with a combined response rate of 51%. The participants' responses were indicative of synthesizing information to construct opinions, connecting with the

text on a personal level, forming judgments about characters' actions based on documentation from the text, and reflecting on the text in order to determine the motives behind the characters actions. Ten percent of the responses evinced an Intermediate Level of critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Responses in these four categories (Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction) provided evidence that the participants incorporated deductive reasoning to reach a conclusion, constructed a vivid image in their minds based on wording in the text, appreciated the author's writing style, and an active involvement with the text which prompted them to make predictions. The 39% response rate at the Basic Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Ambiguity and Engagement) signified the participants' active involvement with the text. Responses also pointed to an uncertainty in the participants' minds as they interacted with the text and their engagement with the text evoking strong feelings from the participants.

Stage Three – The House of the Scorpion

Coding of the journal responses for Stage Three of the study in response to science fiction unveiled the highest number of responses in the Engagement category (18%) closely followed by the Ambiguity category (17%) (Basic Level). Character Scrutiny had a 13% response rate and Character Affinity (Advanced Level) and Inference and Prediction (Intermediate Level) each had a 9% response rate. Author's Writing Technique (Intermediate Level) was next with an 8% response rate and both Synthesis and Evaluative Inquiry categories (Advanced Level) had a response rate of 7%. Image Construction (Intermediate Level) elicited the least number of responses with 3%.

The eight responses in the Synthesis category attested to the fact that several of the participants were integrating various pieces of information to construct their opinions and judgments at the Advanced Level of critical thinking.

Lydia: *I think it is interesting that Matt said that El Patron was “probably in his own version of Heaven”. Matt is wrong! El Patron would not be going to Heaven. No way! He is going down without hesitation! He has done evil things to an unimaginable extent. I don’t think it is possible for someone to be that retarded. He has so major mental issues. Major ones! Serious brain problems! I can’t imagine what the world would be like if someone as weird as El Patron lived on it. He would ruin the world.*

Emma: *Now when El Patron is dying, because he needs a new heart, Maria wants him to die. Now I know he’s like in his 140’s, but he like saves Matt almost every day. Like with the farm patrol. If they didn’t know he was El Patron’s clone he could of gotten killed or hurt, because if El Patron died now, and Matt was in trouble, saying your El Patron’s clone isn’t going to work.*

The eleven responses in the Character Affinity category (Advanced Level) revealed that the participants had made a personal connection to one of the characters. The participants’ responses provided evidence that the text had inspired a connection between the text and the participant compelling him/her to articulate this association.

Gary: *In the book when it said “it looks like those tanks go all the way to the water” that reminded me in science class when we had fish, the aquariums were lined up all around the room.*

David: *If cloning becomes a big business when I got older, than I'm going to be with El Viejo: God will give me a certain number of years and I will be happy with it.*

The 15 responses elicited in the Character Scrutiny category (Advanced Level) denoted the participants' active engagement with the characters in the story and willingness to evaluate the behavior of the character. The responses also demonstrated the participants' judgment concerning the characters.

Emma: *To me (at least) Rosa is very rude to Matt because he's a clone. Maybe I don't understand, because she treats him like a dog and clones aren't that different than people.*

Lydia: *I was glad that El Patron died, but now I'm not so sure. I'm glad, I think it would have been better if they didn't have his body, because then he wouldn't have been buried with all those people, because he wouldn't be there. He was such a jerk. He said he was living 8 lives for his dead siblings but he took thousands of lives of young children, elderly people, & even family.*

There were eight responses in the Evaluative Inquiry category (Advanced Level) and these responses represented the participants' willingness to question certain aspects of the characters' lives or pose questions that required an evaluative response.

Harris: *How would you feel if every one told you the wrong things you done?*

Emma: *Speaking of Consuela & Guapo and El Patron, do they know (according to Esperanza) that they were hosting the new El Patron? Would it matter to them? Would they just go on with their lives and think he's just better than the*

real El Patron? Or would they do bad things to him? These questions I wonder .

Hmmm....

The top four Advanced Level categories in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry) demonstrated an Advanced Level of critical thinking with a combined response rate of 36%. The participants' responses were indicative of synthesizing information to construct opinions, connecting on a personal level, forming judgments about characters' actions based on documentation from the text, and reflecting on the motives that incited characters to respond in a certain manner. Twenty-nine percent of the responses evinced an Intermediate Level of critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. Responses in these four categories (Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction) provided evidence that the participants employed deductive reasoning to form conclusions, constructed vivid images in their minds, appreciated the author's writing style, and formulated predictions. The 35% response rate at the Basic Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Ambiguity and Engagement) indicated active engagement with the text evoking strong emotions from the participants or an uncertainty in the participants' minds as they interacted with the text.

The response rate for the Advanced Level of critical thinking categories derived from the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* exhibited a dramatic increase in the number of responses from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (29%) to Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (51%). Although there was a decrease in responses at this Advanced Level of critical thinking from Stage Two – *The Holocaust*

(51%) to Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (36%), this still represented an increase from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (29%). The marked increase in responses at the Advanced Level of critical thinking (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry categories) from Stage Two may have been the result of the compelling and disturbing nature of the subject matter inherent in these historical fiction and nonfiction narrative novels. There was a steady decline in the number of responses generated in the Basic Level of critical thinking categories derived from the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. The combined response rate from the Ambiguity and Engagement categories demonstrated a 44% response rate for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a decrease to 39% for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and a further decrease to 35% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. This decrease in Basic Level critical thinking may have partially been the result of persistent encouragement on the part of the researcher to extract higher levels of critical thinking from the participants.

Literature Circle Discussion Responses

The literature circle discussions were held in Mrs. Cook's fifth grade classroom. The participants and I formed a circle in order to ensure active involvement by all participants. All literature circle discussions were video recorded and digital voice recorded to guarantee accurate recording of the discussions. In Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* - the literature circle discussions were held after the participants had completed reading two chapters in the novel resulting in a total of six discussions. These discussions ranged from 25 to 35 minutes in length and each participant had the

opportunity to initiate one of the discussions. In Stage Two – The Holocaust, a total of five literature circle discussions were held. The participants did not have specific reading assignments prior to meeting for the discussions due to the fact that they were reading self-selected novels based on the Holocaust. The length of these five literature circle discussions ranged from 23 to 32 minutes in length. There were four literature circle discussions for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. All participants were reading the same science fiction novel and the reading assignments varied in length from 65 pages to 140 pages for each discussion. The length of the literature circle discussions ranged from 23 minutes to 30 minutes.

The coding for the literature circle discussions was initially derived from the ten categories of response that were developed from the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, Evaluative Inquiry, Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, Prediction, Ambiguity, and Engagement. However, coding individual responses did not generate an accurate portrayal of the literature circle discussions, thus prompting an analysis of *sequence of responses* centered around one discussion topic. Three levels of literature circle response critical thinking were initially developed: Analytical, Probe, and Engagement and the sequences were then coded following these three levels.

Through repeated, intense examination of the transcripts, it became apparent that a sequence of responses did not always remain at the same level. Discussion at the end of a sequence was used to outline the various levels of critical thinking found in one sequence of the literature circle discussion. At this time it was apparent that there were actually four levels of response emerging instead of the original three. The final four

sequence levels of the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking* are: (1) Analytical; (2) Probe; (3) Conjecture; and (4) Engagement. Table 4.8 provides an overview of these four levels of oral response.

Table 4.8 Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking

Level	Definition	Excerpt from Transcripts
Analytical (Advanced Level)	The oral responses reflected an advanced level of critical thinking. Synthesis of information, constructing judgments, evaluation, and personal connections were the main impetus of these discussions.	<p>Lydia: Do you think the Holocaust or at least World War II made a difference on the way Jewish people think of their religion today? Do they look at their religion as not as good?</p> <p>David: I think they look at it a little more proudly because they know that their ancestors survived. They're okay now, they're going to be happy about it because...</p> <p>Lydia: That the Jews have already been through a lot and that they've suffered and now they're still around.</p> <p>David: They're still here.</p> <p>Lydia: They're not extinct.</p> <p>David: They're still here. They are feeling pretty good about themselves. They made it out alive. (The Holocaust books)</p>

<p>Probe (Advanced Level)</p>	<p>The oral responses reflected advanced critical thinking as the participants probed deeper into the actions of the characters forming judgments, defining characters' personality traits, and providing documentation for their reasoning.</p>	<p>Harris: Do you think Matt is using Fidelito and Chacho? Gary: No, because when Matat first came there he didn't really have any friends and then Fidelito and Chacho became his true friends. I don't so... Lydia: I want to know if he would leave them because Fidelito is so weak and small. He's only like 8 and um if he left Fidelito then Chacho might not stay with Fidelito because hs is small and I think he is just kind of running along with Matt who is going with, umm Fidelito, and I don't think that Chacho would necessarily take care of Fidelito the way that Matt does. Gary: They don't always agree, Fidelito and Chacho. Lydia: They don't what? Gary: Agree. Like they don't always have the same opinion on everything. David: That's kind of natural but... Harris: Or they would be clones. <i>(The House of the Scorpion)</i></p>
<p>Conjecture (Intermediate Level)</p>	<p>The oral responses reflected an Intermediate level of critical thinking from the participants. Deductive reasoning was applied as conclusions were formed relevant to future events in the story. Active involvement resulted in a willingness to make predictions.</p>	<p>Lydia: What's Little Man going to do? Is he going to accept that book or is he going to rip it up or something or do something bad to his next book? David: You can't really... Harris: I think if his mom put the paper on it he'd probably take it but he wouldn't like it as much but he'd like it better. <i>(Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry)</i></p>
<p>Engagement (Basic Level)</p>	<p>The oral responses reflected a basic level of thinking. An understanding of the characters and the plot of the text were evident in the responses. Instances of temporary uncertainty by a participant and the resulting clarification provided by other participants were evidence in these responses.</p>	<p>Lydia: Because he was in the back of the crowd and when they said get a drink and he didn't get a drink and he just kept working all night. Gary: Like Matt's teacher she just kept teaching the same things over and over. Lydia: That was funny. It was like count the beads, count the apples, count the oranges. <i>(The House of the Scorpion)</i></p>

The Analytical and Probe levels of oral sequence response demonstrated an Advanced Level of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. The participants' level of discussion revealed their ability to synthesize, make personal connections, evaluate, and construct opinions solidified with information gleaned from the text. Sequences of oral response at the Conjecture Level signified an Intermediate Level of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. Discussions at this level exhibited the participants' willingness to integrate information from the text and then employ deductive reasoning to construct inferences. Actively engaged in the text, the participants freely voiced their predictions as to what they believed may happen next in the story. The Engagement Level of oral sequence response demonstrated a basic level of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. While these sequences of oral response in literature circles illustrated the participants' understanding and perceptions of the text, discussions at this level did not raise response to an advanced level of critical thinking.

The levels of critical thinking that were originally derived in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* were used as a basis for developing levels of critical thinking for the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. Table 4.9 provides a comparison of the levels of advanced, intermediate, and basic level critical thinking between the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* and the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*.

Table 4.9 Comparison of Critical Thinking Levels

Levels of Critical Thinking	Response Journal Categories	Literature Circle Discussion Levels
Advanced Level Critical Thinking	Synthesis Character Affinity Character Scrutiny Evaluative Inquiry	Analytical Probe
Intermediate Level Critical Thinking	Inference Image Construction Author's Writing Technique Prediction	Conjecture
Basic Level Critical Thinking	Ambiguity Engagement	Engagement

Detailed descriptions of each of these four levels along with indented, italicized participant excerpts from the transcripts follow to further clarify the codes that were assigned to each sequence of oral response. All excerpts from the transcripts are quoted using the authentic language of the participants.

Analytical Level

At the ANALYTICAL LEVEL the participants exhibit the advanced degree of critical level thinking through oral response during a literature circle. The participants have made personal connections with the text and are willing to interject how they would react in a particular incident. The participants may indicate their agreement with a character's actions and believe they would have reacted in a similar manner. At times the responses generated by participants indicated their belief that characters had acted incorrectly and expressed their opinion as to appropriate behavior in those situations. Sequence of responses voiced during this advanced level of discourse may also have been posed as questions soliciting opinions from the participants. Discussions at this level may also reveal connections that were made between this novel and other text or movies. The responses also indicate the participants' ability to synthesize the information in order

to form their own conclusions. This level of response represents a deeper understanding of the text and the participant's desire to understand the world around them. Responses voiced at this Advanced Level align with the Synthesis, Character Affinity, and Evaluative Inquiry categories used in the coding of the response journals. The following excerpt of a transcript from Stage Two – The Holocaust presents this Analytical level of response.

Harris: *Do you think some of those guys in the war enjoyed killing those kids?*

Gary: *No*

Mrs. D: *Give me a reason, you can't just say no.*

Gary: *Because even if they didn't like the Jews, even though they were kids and they were Jews, maybe they didn't just feel right to go out there and blow the kids' heads off.*

Scott: *Or maybe just in case there was a time when the Jews could become slaves, the kids would, instead of, if they killed all the grownups if there was a time in the future where the Jews were slaves the parents, the grownups might not even be around then but the kids would be all grown up and had bigger muscles and stuff so they could do stuff for them.*

David: *I think that, I don't think that all of the Germans, all of the Nazis agreed with what Hitler was saying about Jews and stuff. But I think they kind of had to because they either had no money and they needed a paying job or they feared him and the guys that did believe about the Jews and stuff, so they just feared him so much they just went along with him and acted like they really hated it. And I think their feelings over time kind of went that way.*

Lydia: *They kind of had no choice because it said that they really want to fight, the kids that were fighting.*

David: *If they got drafted they had to go*

Lydia: *They had no choice. If they say no I'm not going to shoot these kids over here then they would shoot you. It said on the back of Soldier X it was either kill or be killed. No choice.*

Probe Level

At the PROBE LEVEL the participants are moving beyond the surface level of literature circle discussion and are willing to insert their own advanced ideas about the characters and their subsequent involvement in the story. Sequences of response at the Probe Level represent an advanced level of critical thinking. They are probing for answers as to why characters act the way that they do and how their behavior affects the development of the story. In addition, the participants define various characteristics of the characters and document their reasoning with the text. The participants use words such as “What did you think?”, “What were your reactions?”, or “Were you surprised?” The participants incorporated information from the text when discussing at this level. The responses at this level align with Character Scrutiny (Advanced Level) and Image Construction (Intermediate Level) categories used in the coding of the response journals. The following excerpt of a transcript from Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* presents this level of response.

David: *I kind of think, kind of a wise decision to make Rosa an eejit but I think it's kind of taken a toll on Matt because he's like just not use to her, he's use to her threatening him and threatening to bury him under the floorboards and instead of being kind and following his orders.*

Mrs. D: *And how does Matt feel about what's happened to Rosa?*

David: *He doesn't like it I don't think.*

Lydia: *He's, it just made him realize a lot of things about the eejits. I don't think he really had any feelings about her. I think he had feelings more about oh the eejits, will they ever come back. Will they even like turn on him if they came back and he was thinking that, can they change back to normal people. I think that was just his thoughts from seeing Rosa.*

David: *And he's like trying to make her like human again.*

Mrs. D: *How did he do that?*

David: *Just trying to talk to her and make her thoughts come back, not just a chip.*

Lydia: *I think it's funny that they respond immediately. Do you want another horse? Because he talks and she doesn't know what he's saying because it's not an order.*

David: *It's not considered an order. Eejits follow orders.*

Lydia: *He would say tell me blah la la, and then they think it's just a question and...*

David: *I think he's trying to like regenerate a thought process. Maybe like to maybe get some memories back about how she hated him. I mean he'd probably rather she hated him then see her as an eejit because it's just not what he is use to like he, like when you see something and you get really use to it um you don't what it to change and its really, really hard like if on Guitar Hero there is 5 buttons on the guitar and once you start playing the last one you have to get use to changing your hands like this or get better, it takes awhile. I don't know, it's changing.*

Conjecture Level

At the CONJECTURE LEVEL the participants are actively involved in discussing what is transpiring in the story and are willing to make predictions as to what they believe will occur next. The participants are also integrating events in the story and employing deductive reasoning to form their own conclusions. Participants' responses may be posed as questions indicating their particular view about future occurrences. The responses indicate that the participants are using an Intermediate Level of critical thinking as they discuss in literature circles at this level. Sequence of responses at this level aligns with the Inference and Prediction categories used in the coding of the response journals and are indicative of Intermediate Level critical thinking. The following excerpt of a transcript from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* presents this level of response.

Lydia: *Do you think she's going to pay, do you think anyone in her family is going to pay for what she did?*

Donald: *Probably*

Lydia: *Like when she ran into Miss Lillian Jean. Do you think her dad is going to be mad at someone in their family?*

Gary: *He might be part of the night riders and tell them and they might come.*

Harris: *Well the night riders probably couldn't hurt them because or Uncle Hammer is there now and Mr. Morrison so they couldn't get to them too bad.*

David: *But there is quite a few night riders against a couple men, still it's going to be hard.*

Harris: *Yeah*

Engagement Level

At the ENGAGEMENT LEVEL the participants' literature circle discussion exhibits an understanding of the characters and the plot of the story. Comments are made concerning specific instances in the text. The participants may comment about feelings aroused from a character or a particular incident in the text. Responses at this level also include clarification of vocabulary or phrases that participants are unfamiliar with, as well as specific episodes in the text that were confusing. Sequence of response at this level aligns with the Engagement and Ambiguity categories used in the coding of the response journals and represent a Basic Level of critical thinking. The following excerpt of a transcript from Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* presents this level of response.

Harris: *What did you guys think of Fidelito's map of the world?*

Lydia: *That was funny.*

Emma: *Those two were going on and on about that.*

David: *I know*

Emma: *Show me the map of the world*

David: *It's kind of funny because that's, I was like the first time we read it was like I'm going to show them the map of the world. What?*

Lydia: *And Matt was like we don't have a map of the world*

David: *And he was like what?*

Lydia: *That was so funny, he said I don't have a map of the world.*

Mrs. D: *Why was it called Map of the World?*

David: *I have no idea.*

Harris: *Cause it's been all over*

Lydia: *He is saying that Matt showed him the map of the world*

David: *No Fidelito did*

Lydia: *Oh*

David: *It's kind of funny and then when they're in that little thing, that party and it turned out to be a party while they are trying to get to the hospital and see Chacho and then Fidelito says I'm going to show them the map of the world.*

Lydia: *And he's like no,*

David: *And then Matt is like...*

Advanced Level critical thinking was evident in the Analytical and Probe levels of oral sequence of response manifested in the literature circle discussions. The sequence of response at these two levels demonstrated the participants' ability to probe deeper into the text by engaging in critical discourse. Conjecture level sequence of responses presented Intermediate Level critical thinking. The dialogue of the participants exhibited deductive reasoning, inference skills, and an alacrity to make predictions. Basic Level critical thinking was displayed at the Engagement level. Participants actively

communicated feelings that were incited by reading of the text and they were uninhibited in disclosing areas of the text that were unclear or rendered a temporary ambiguity.

Multi-Level Sequences

As stated previously, a sequence of response was determined to be a series of oral responses within a literature circle discussion centered on a single topic. Through repeated, diligent examination of the transcripts it became evident that sequences of response did not always remain at a single level. There were many instances of sequences that indicated a fluctuation of two, three, or even all four levels of response. These *multi-level sequences* were identified and coded based on the four levels of *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*: Analytical, Probe, Conjecture, and Engagement. In order to distinguish the movement of response level manifested in a sequence, this change in level of response was indicated in the sequence. This movement from one level to another within a sequence was then summarized at the conclusion of the sequence. Coding produced six separate *Two-Level Sequence* classifications, three separate *Three-Level Sequence* classifications, and one *Four-Level Sequence* classification. Descriptions of each of the *multi-level sequences* along with indented, italicized participant excerpts from the transcripts follow to further clarify the coding assigned to each type of sequence.

Two-Level Sequence

A two-level sequence is manifested by the presence of responses within a literature circle discussion from two separate levels of oral response. In this type of sequence, a participant initiated the discussion at one level, but a second level of response was infused during the discourse. Six two-level sequence classifications emerged:

Engagement/Conjecture, Engagement/Probe, Engagement/Analytical, Conjecture/Probe, Conjecture/Analytical, and Probe/Analytical.

Engagement/Conjecture two-level sequence.

Sequences containing Engagement and Conjecture level responses typified basic level thinking with responses at the Engagement Level and intermediate level critical thinking with responses at the Conjecture Level. In the excerpt that follows from Stage Three- *The House of the Scorpion*, the sequence was initiated with an intermediate Conjecture Level response and discussion continued at this level for several responses before changing to the basic Engagement Level. The Engagement Level responses clarified the relationship between several characters in the story.

Harris: *Do you think Steven saw Matt when he got on the helicopter? How do you think that Steven knew Matt was getting on the helicopter?* **Conjecture Level**

Lydia: *I think maybe he was in the computer room, the electrical room and saw them on the camera.*

Mrs. D: *But remember they went out in a place where they couldn't... So how did they know?*

David: *I just think he kind of knew.*

Scott: *Maybe they just followed him.*

Gary: *Because Maria likes Matt so much he just kind of figured it out.*

David: *I think he just kind of figured it out and just kind of knew it.*

Lydia: *It's really interesting that Emilia immediately takes sides with Steven because if she didn't he's her husband anyways but um and now they are together and they can make a decision together but she was like telling Maria he's a clone he doesn't matter. El Patron needs him. Then El Patron matters and she was kind of like against her sister and then Steven took sides with Emilea and then he said like no, get off the plane and take him to the hospital, we're going to kill him.*

David: *Actually I think if the laws were the same as they are today than you can't get married to family then Maria couldn't marry Tom or Matt because Matt is blood Alacran.*

Lydia: *Yeah, but she isn't an Alacran.* **Change to Engagement Level**

David: *And Steven is an Alacran and then Emilea is her big sister who is a Mendoza. If they got married then that's kind of like Alacran blood.*

Lydia: *But that's by marriage, not by blood.*

David: *So it's still something like that but anyway, but then also Steven's mother is also Tom's mother.*

Sequence ends. Conjecture Level (Intermediate Level critical thinking) changes to Engagement Level (Basic Level critical thinking) for the last four responses.

Engagement/Probe two-level sequence.

Sequences containing Engagement and Probe level responses demonstrated basic level thinking with the Engagement responses and advanced level critical thinking with the responses at the Probe Level. In the excerpt that follows from Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, this two-level sequence was initiated with a response at the Engagement Level. The sequence moved to Probe Level with the discussion of El Patron and his possessions. A response by Scott revealing a misunderstanding moved the sequence back to Engagement Level.

Lydia: *Don't you think it's kind of weird that he had a tattoo on his foot that said property of Alacran Estate. I thought that was ..* **Engagement Level**

David: *No because*

Lydia: *That marks him*

David: *You remember the chapter, Celia's story that she said once El Patron said that once something is his and that's pretty much him and he owns people pretty much like he owns a possession or a watch or something, but since it's a clone they are kind of referring to him like an animal or a pet* **Changes to Probe Level response**

Mrs. D: *So is he an animal?*

Harris: *No*

Mrs. D: *Why do you say no Hunter cause everybody in the book says he is? Why do you say no?*

Lydia: *They're not right.*

Harris: *Cause he, I don't really know. He doesn't really act like one and he can speak English.*

Mrs. D: *So what if he didn't speak English? Would he be an animal then?*

David: *No, because...*

Mrs. D: *I'm going to push you on this*

David: *There are a lot of languages in the world and I don't think that just the language classifies you as human or un-human.*

Mrs. D: *Okay. So I need people to tell me. Is he an animal? And if he's not you're going to tell me why he isn't and if you don't tell me why he isn't then I am going to assume you think he is and then you're going to tell me why you think he is.*

David: *A lot of people think he is an animal because I think it was either Steven or Tom, one of them said, "You're an animal you were pooped out by a cow."*

Gary: *It was Tom*

David: *It's Tom cause they kinda, he was kind of born from a cow, if he was born from a cow that's not exactly a human.*

Lydia: *They've taught chimps and stuff to be smart and they've taught them to smoke cigars and drive cars and things but they are still animals, but this guy is a human, he's not an animal. Animals are dumb. He's not dumb.*

Scott: *Well usually clones are animals because when they are born they have to, there's a law that you have to put a little chip inside their brain or something that makes them stupid. **Changes back to Engagement Level***

David: *No, they don't do that.*

Mrs. D: *Are you talking about in the book?*

Scott: *Yeah*

Lydia: *They're talking about*

David: *In the book they don't do that.*

Mrs. D: *They don't do what?*

David: *They don't put a chip into clones' heads. They take regular people to make them eejits they like do a certain surgery to put a chip in their head.*

Lydia: *Yeah, but when they make a clone, they do that to clones to like make them stupid so they don't know anything*

David: *Actually they ...*

Sequence starts with Engagement Level responses (Basic Level critical thinking), switches to Probe Level response (Advanced Level critical thinking), and then changes back to Engagement Level for clarification (Basic Level critical thinking).

Engagement/Analytical two-level sequence.

Sequences containing Engagement and Analytical level responses demonstrated basic level critical thinking with Engagement Level responses and advanced level critical thinking with responses at the Analytical Level. In the excerpt that follows from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* this two-level sequence was initiated with a response at the Engagement Level prompting several more Engagement Level responses before Lydia changed the level of responses to Analytical by incorporating a connection to a real life situation.

Donald: *You wanted us to look at the last page?* **Engagement Level**

Mrs. D: *Yes, I do I want you all to look at the last page.*

Donald: *I looked at the bottom phrase right there and I thought it was weird*

Mrs. D: *Why is the last sentence weird?*

Donald: *Because if Stacey at the very beginning they didn't really like TJ and then at the very end that she cried for TJ and she cried for the land. I thought that was a really cool phrase.*

Mrs. D: *Why?*

Donald: *Because it's kind of like she didn't like him very much in the beginning, in the middle because he told mama that he...*

Mrs. D: *So why does she like him now?*

Donald: *Because she, she feels sorry for him and because he stood up, he didn't really blurt out anything, he knew that he went in there, and I think that she thought that he like stood up for himself when he was there because he knew he did something wrong that he broke into the general store.*

Mrs. D: *Okay Lydia you're disagreeing with him.*

Lydia: *I was going to say because you don't have to know someone and to like someone to feel sorry for them because I don't think she feels sorry for him, she's just sad for him because if you think about the accident with John Doe and they think that he's drown, I don't know him and I couldn't say that I ever liked him because I never knew him but I am still sad for him.* **Changes to Analytical Level**

David: *And it's kind of hard, when something like that happens and one it's hard to put yourself in that place, you don't know what exactly they are going through and if you don't really know them it's a little harder to be sad, because you don't really know. I think she might just be scared for him.*

Mrs. D: *But why does she say I cried for TJ and the land?*

Donald: *Because she knew, I thought that she knew that they wouldn't make it since all that cotton got burned. I think she knew that they wouldn't make it, they wouldn't be able to pay the bills or anything. They would have to move and everything they would have to sell the land.*

Mrs. D: *Okay, what do you guys think?*

Emma: *Yeah probably.*

Mrs. D: *Yeah, probably what?*

Emma: *That maybe that the cotton was burned and she might think that they might not be able to make it and everything.*

David: *I think she cried because...*

Lydia: *Yeah, she thinks TJ may not make it and the land may not make it.*

David: *Yeah because that was really a rough time because when that fire, it was a hard decision, but I think papa knew what he was doing. He knew that TJ was going to end up not dead, well maybe, but then I think he also knew that there was going to be a struggle for the bills, but I think maybe somebody, like Mr. Jamison might end up helping them out.*

Donald: *I agree with David because he knew what he was doing but it was kind of like they are like in sharecropping mode, they only have exactly enough or maybe even less to get by because earlier in there it said that they were running out of food and they didn't have enough money to buy any more stuff, they only had enough to pay off the bills and since um papa wasn't working at the railroads and he couldn't it was horrible.*

Sequence started at Engagement Level (Basic Level critical thinking), then moved to Analytical Level (Advanced Level critical thinking)

Conjecture/Probe two-level sequence.

Sequences containing Conjecture and Probe level responses exhibited intermediate level critical thinking at the Conjecture Level and advanced critical thinking with responses at the Probe Level. In the excerpt that follows from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* - this two-level sequence was initiated with a response at the Conjecture Level prompting several more Conjecture Level responses before David's response changed the sequence to Probe Level with a discussion of Mr. Morrison.

Lydia: *Do you think Mr. Morrison thinks they'll come back? Is that why he's in someone else's house, is he just using them for cover and money? Because he may be just doing that for home and for hiding from more night riders because he thinks they are going to come back.* **Conjecture Level**

Mrs. D: *But he was only 6 when that happened Lydia, he's an older man now.*

David: *I don't think he would do that. I don't think he's that kind of a person, I think he's a lot more gentler than he seems.* **Changes to Probe Level**

Emma: *Because he saved them from a lot of things like when they went to the Wallace store he brought them back.*

Lydia: *And he said I'll leave it up to you to telling your mom that you went down to where you weren't suppose to go.*

Emma: *And he stopped Uncle Hammer from going and maybe getting himself killed by the Simms.*

Gary: *So he's kind of saved the family.*

Harris: *Yeah*

David: *So he's not really like that, he's almost like part of the family.*

Donald: *He's like an uncle.*

David: *He actually said he's been brought really good cooking, a home, a place to stay and work and also he has been pretty much been given a family.*

Harris: *Yeah*

Sequence started with Conjecture Level (Intermediate Level critical thinking) and then moved to Probe Level (Advanced Level critical thinking)

Conjecture/Analytical two-level sequence.

Sequences containing responses at the Conjecture and Analytical levels evidenced intermediate level critical thinking at the Conjecture Level and advanced critical thinking with responses at the Analytical Level. In the excerpt that follows from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, this two-level sequence was initiated with a response at the Conjecture Level prompting one more Conjecture Level response and then Lydia's response changed the sequence to the Analytical Level with her synthesis of the Logan's financial situation.

David: *Do you think that when they said we'll pay for that, that it has something to do with this fire?* **Conjecture Level**

Gary: *Maybe (Inaudible)*

Emma: *Or it might just be another joke, it might not be something bad.*

Lydia: *I was thinking about, how did he pay for this car because it seemed like only the white people who had more money then black people could pay for cars*

and not very many of them could and it didn't seem like the Logans had terribly a lot of money because they were living like people who wouldn't have a car back then. **Moved to Analytical Level**

Sequence started at the Conjecture Level (Intermediate Level critical thinking) and the last response moved to Analytical Level (Advanced Level critical thinking).

Probe/Analytical two-level sequence.

A sequence that contained Probe and Analytical level responses indicated an advanced level of critical thinking throughout the entire sequence. In the excerpt that follows from Stage Two – The Holocaust, this two-level sequence was initiated with an Analytical Level question prompting several analytical responses before the sequence changed to the Probe Level.

Harris: *If you were Hitler would you rip someone's tongue out if they spoke against you to keep power?* **Analytical Level**

Mrs. D: *That sticks with a lot of you, doesn't it?*

David: *No because I wouldn't want to put my hand in somebody's mouth, that would feel weird.*

Lydia: *I couldn't imagine. They could bite my hand. That's pretty nasty.*

Harris: *Would they have ripped your tongue out with pliers or something?*
Changes to Probe Level

David: *The thing is that would probably make your tongue bleed and your tongue isn't able to form scabs so it would just keep bleeding until you suffered major blood loss and probably died.*

Sequence started with Analytical Level question then last two responses move to Probe Level (Advanced Level critical thinking)

The examples of two-level sequence of response revealed that participants initiated a sequence with a response at one level, but at some point the sequence moved to a second critical thinking level. As evidenced by the excerpt for Engagement/Probe level sequence, a two-level sequence may begin at one level, move to the second level,

and then change back to the initial level. Both of these types of two-level sequences were coded as a Two-Level sequence.

Three-Level Sequence

A three-level sequence of critical thinking during literature circle discussion was evidenced by the presence of responses from three separate levels of oral response. In this type of sequence, a participant initiated the discussion at the first level; a second level of response was then introduced; and a third level was also interspersed in the discussion. Three three-level sequence classifications emerged: Engagement/Conjecture/Probe, Engagement/Probe/Analytical, and Conjecture/Probe/Analytical.

Engagement/Conjecture/Probe three-level sequence.

Three-level sequences at this level produced basic level critical thinking with responses at the Engagement Level, intermediate level thinking with the participants' responses at the Conjecture Level, and advanced level critical thinking with responses at the Probe Level. An excerpt from Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* - revealed a discussion that fluctuated between the levels of Engagement, Conjecture, and Probe.

Lydia: *Remember that I think the way that Furball got killed is that Tom killed him, but and they know that he was killed on the medicine, on the drug that Felicia takes.* **Conjecture Level**

David: *Laudanum* **Engagement Level**

Lydia: *Yeah, that was what killed Furball but they have a bottle that Matt left there that has Matt's fingerprints on it.*

David: *Yeah cause he carried it barehanded out there. I think Tom...*

Lydia: *Tom took a different bottle.* **Conjecture Level**

David: *Yeah*

Lydia: *Cause Felicia has a hundred bottles.*

David: *Cause Tom saw him coming out so after Matt left he probably went back to investigate, saw that and knew that, and since he is older than Matt and human, he's got a pretty good brain. He's good at thinking and getting people into trouble even though it's not good for other people, it's good for him because he's got a good brain. **Probe Level***

Lydia: *He...*

David: *Because that's his mother. **Engagement Level***

Lydia: *Yeah, he could just go into her room and sneak out a bottle and maybe he didn't even sneak out the bottle. **Conjecture Level***

David: *Yeah, he knew, he probably knew his mother, she's kind of a zombie pretty much, but he knew what did that so he took a different bottle, gave it to Furball, went back, put it back and everybody will see the laudanum on the shelf with Matt's fingerprints.*

Lydia: *And Furball is dead and they go that's what killed him.*

Emma: *It's like the only evidence they have.*

Lydia: *It's a strong drug. It's enough to make Felicia dopey. But it makes, it kills Furball.*

David: *Furball, think about it, they're in Mexico it's a small dog kind of like a rat, I'm thinking he's a Chihuahua cause they're really small.*

Emma: *It said he was really furry.*

Harris: *Chihuahuas aren't furry.*

Lydia: *Some are. They have long-haired Chihuahuas.*

David: *I don't know.*

Mrs. D: *Lydia has kind of made a prediction. She has said, or she has inferred if you want to say that and David, that Tom is really the one who killed Furball. What do the rest of you think, do you disagree with that?*

Scott: *No*

Harris: *Maybe Tom just wore rubber gloves and put...*

Lydia: *That would have taken away Matt's fingerprints.*

Harris: Yeah, that would have smeared the fingerprints

Lydia: *So all he had to do was take another bottle.*

Sequence began with a Conjecture Level response (Intermediate Level critical thinking) followed by two Basic Level responses at the Engagement Level to clarify. The discussion moved back to Conjecture Level responses followed by one Probe Level response indicating advanced level critical thinking when discussing a character. A basic Engagement Level response was interjected to make a clarification and then the discussion moved back to Conjecture Level responses indicating Intermediate Level critical thinking as the participants made predictions/inferences.

Engagement/Probe/Analytical three-level sequence.

Three level sequences at this level demonstrated basic level critical thinking with Engagement Level responses, advanced levels of critical thinking with Probe Level and Analytical Level responses. An excerpt of a transcript from Stage Two – The Holocaust - represents this type of three-level sequence.

Harris: *How would you feel if you were a soldier for Hitler?* **Analytical Level**

Lydia: *Like my life was going down the drain seriously because it's just, it's about the worst thing that can possibly happen to you.*

Mrs. D: *Do you think they felt that way from the very beginning?*

Lydia: *No*

Mrs. D: *When did it change?*

Lydia: *As soon as they got into the army or realized what time, what was happening in that time.*

David: *What really was going on.*

Lydia: *Because like the kid in Soldier X also said that he had always dreamed of being a soldier for the German army and he thought that was, that he would be a hero if he did that, but I think it's more like being a murderer.*

David: *I actually thought, maybe not from the beginning I would probably feel ashamed about myself because killing people just because they were different.*

Mrs. D: *Did anybody's book mention that fact? Does anybody remember if they mentioned that in the book? I do.* **Changes to Engagement Level**

David: *They felt ashamed?*

Mrs. D: *Well, or that they started to question.*

Harris: *Yeah, Soldier X*

Mrs. D: *Can you remember that incident at all or what happened to make that boy really start questioning.*

Harris: *When he went into the battlefield or no, not when he went into the battlefield when he had to live with those guys in the hut deal and to be ready for war.*

Lydia: *In the long underwear?*

Harris: *Yeah*

Mrs. D.: *But what about at the very beginning when they are riding on that train. Go ahead.*

Scott: *If I were Hitler I would want to make a really big army. If the newest soldiers came in I wouldn't probably send them to the death camps because then they would probably realize what they were fighting for and "Oh my gosh, this is what I'm fighting for?" No way.* **Changes to Analytical Level**

Mrs. D: *In Soldier X, and I don't know if you are there yet, but you would have read it and you would have read it, remember when, at the very beginning he is on that train and one time they have to stop and they go into that one building.* **Changes to Engagement Level**

Harris: *Oh yeah.*

Mrs. D: *And he sees those Jews who served him food that looked not like people any more because they haven't been fed and they don't have*

Lydia: *And he described them as skeletons*

Mrs. D: *He's questioning it right away. In The Book Thief remember when Mr. Steiner who is not a Jewish person but he runs that tailor shop and he had that one page that outlined his political beliefs and they were kind of controversial and he*

David: *And wasn't he a judge too, I think.*

Mrs. D: *And he says, “On the one hand it is good for his business because there are less tailors but just because you’re Jewish does that mean that you should be run out? I mean he questioned it, and I can’t remember anything that I have read in The Diary of Anne Frank that would make me say that but in the other books there are those questions. In The Boy in the Striped Pajamas you know Bruno is so young*

Scott: *And naïve.* **Changes to Probe Level**

Mrs. D: *You’re right. What a perfect word to describe him. I’m not sure if we could say that. It will be interested to see when you read to see if you think there is anything in that book that makes you think that Bruno starts to question.*

David: *I think that in the Book Thief they’re either kind of with it or against it from the beginning, other than Mr. Steiner. You’re pretty much with it from the beginning or against it from the beginning.*

Sequence started at the highest level of Advanced Level critical thinking with Analytical Level responses. Mrs. D. switched the discussion to Basic Engagement Level by asking for specific documentation. One Analytical Level response was interjected followed by two Basic Engagement Level responses. The last three responses at Probe Level indicated an Advanced Level of critical thinking.

Conjecture/Probe/Analytical three-level sequence.

Three level sequences at this level demonstrated intermediate level thinking with Conjecture Level responses, advanced levels of critical thinking with Probe Level responses, and the highest advanced level of critical thinking with Analytical Level responses. An excerpt of a transcript from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* represents this type of three-level sequence.

David: *I wouldn’t like to be the little kid having to wait all that time. He’s been gone for all that time and I have no idea when he’s going to be back.* **Analytical Level**

Donald: *If he comes back.* **Changes to Conjecture Level**

Lydia: *It’s probably not safe because they didn’t have a dad with them.*

Harris: *And they didn’t have a dad with them.*

David: *Stacey kind of acts like the dad so that he can...* **Changes to Probe Level**

Gary: *Their dad is going to go back to the railroad and help because he has Mr. Morrison and he doesn't have anybody because he didn't have anything to...*

David: *I don't know if he needs protection.* **Changes to Conjecture Level**

Donald: *You don't know if he is going to come back from the railroad. You don't really know how dangerous it is.*

Lydia: *I wonder if Mr. Morrison is going to stay when their dad comes back or if he is just going to be there while their dad's not there. Because if their dad comes back to stay then they might not need his help or they may like him enough that they are going to let him stay.*

Gary: *Good point.*

Sequence started with the highest Advanced Level of critical thinking with an Analytical Level response. The sequence changed to Intermediate Level thinking with Conjecture Level responses that made inferences/prediction. Two responses were at Advanced Levels of critical thinking with Probe Level responses and then the sequence moved back to Intermediate Conjecture Level responses.

The three-level sequences of oral response provided evidence that participants were capable of shifting freely from one level of response to a second and third level of response during a single sequence. Two of the three-level sequences contained basic level responses (Engagement Level) and two of the three-level sequences contained the advanced level of critical thinking (Analytical Level). The Conjecture/Probe/Analytical sequence contained responses at the Intermediate and Advanced Levels of critical thinking.

Four-Level Sequence

There were a total of three sequences within literature circle discussions that included all four levels of response: Engagement, Conjecture, Probe, and Analytical. Responses in a four-level sequence covered the spectrum of the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking* levels with basic level critical thinking to the

advanced level of critical thinking. The following excerpt of a transcript from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* documents this type of sequence.

Lydia: *I was thinking the burning that was like a lynching, right? Since one of them died.* **Analytical Level**

David: *Almost.*

Lydia: *Well one died.* **Change to Engagement Level**

David: *Lynching is more like hanging, isn't it?*

Lydia: *Lynching they said it was torture, burning.*

Emma: *That would have been scary for the Logans and other people, the neighbors.* **Moves to Conjecture Level**

Lydia: *That's what it was talking about on that fourth webquest when it said that the blacks who lived nearby to the person who was lynched.* **Moves to Analytical Level**

David: *And they actually see that guy hanging.* **Moves to Probe Level**

Donald: *And they walked by each and every day on their way home from school and everything and they have to look at that and say what if that could have been me.*

Gary: *I'm just mad that they didn't do anything about it.* **Moves to Engagement Level**

David: *I would have been horrified.*

Gary: *I'm mad about that.*

Donald: *Yeah. I would have left.* **Changes to Analytical Level**

Lydia: *You would have been a desperado if you did that now.*
Sequence started with an Advanced Analytical Level responses then moved to a Basic Engagement Level for several responses for clarification. The next response was at the Intermediate Conjecture Level and then the next response moved to the Advanced Analytical Level when one of the participants synthesized information learned in the Webquest. The next two responses were at the Advanced Probe Level followed by three responses at the Basic Engagement level. An Advanced Analytical Level response was

interjected at this point followed by one response at the Intermediate Conjecture Level.

Summary of Sequences

Table 4.10 showing the level of sequence in literature circle discussions for each of the stages is included. The table outlines the number of sequences that were at each of the four levels: Engagement Level, Conjecture Level, Probe Level, and Analytical Level, as well as the number of multi-level sequences.

Table 4.10 – Levels of Literature Circle Discussion Sequence

	Stage One <i>Roll of Thunder</i>	Stage Two The Holocaust Book Discussion	Stage Three <i>The House of the Scorpion</i>
Analytical Sequence (Advanced)	3 3%	12 24%	2 3%
Probe Sequence (Advanced)	24 22%	5 10%	12 18%
Conjecture Sequence (Intermediate)	18 16%	0	1 2%
Engagement Sequence (Basic)	19 17%	15 30%	16 25%
Two Level Sequence			
Engagement/Conjecture (Basic/Intermediate)	7 6%	2 4%	7 11%
Engagement/Probe (Basic/Advanced)	14 13%	8 16%	12 18%
Engagement/Analytical (Basic/Advanced)	1 1%	2 4%	4 6%
Conjecture/Probe (Intermediate/Advanced)	2 2%	0	1 2%
Conjecture/Analytical (Intermediate/Advanced)	4 4%	0	1 2%

Probe/Analytical (Advanced/Advanced)	4 4%	3 6%	1 2%
Three Level Sequence			
Engagement/Conjecture/ Probe (Basic/Intermediate/Advanced)	5 5%	0	3 5%
Engagement/Probe/ Analytical (Basic/Advanced/Advanced)	7 6%	3 6%	3 5%
Conjecture/Probe/ Analytical (Intermediate/Advanced/Advanced)	1 1%	0	1 2%
Four Level Sequence	0	0	0
Engagement/Conjecture/ Probe/Analytical (Basic/Intermediate/Advanced/Advanced)	2 2%	0	1 2%
Total	111	50	65

There were a total of 111 sequences for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 50 sequences for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and 65 sequences for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The highest level of sequence for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was the advanced Probe Level (22%), followed by the basic Engagement Level (17%), and the intermediate Conjecture Level (16%).

In Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, the basic Engagement Level (30%) was the highest level of sequence, followed by the advanced Analytical Level (24%). The two-level Engagement/Probe sequence (16%) had the third highest percentage of sequences followed by the advanced Probe Level sequence (10%). There were no Conjecture Level and several multi-level sequences that were not documented at this stage.

In Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* the Engagement Level sequence presented the highest level of sequencing (25%). Both the Probe Level and the two-level

sequence of Engagement/Probe represented 18% of the total sequences in this stage. The two-level sequence of Engagement/Conjecture represented 11% of the total sequences.

An examination of the two and three-level sequences indicated 28% of the two-level sequences for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, contained advanced Analytical Level responses, the highest level of critical thinking. In the Three-Level sequences for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, 62% of the three-level sequences contained Analytical Level responses. For Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, 33% of the two-level sequences contained responses at the advanced Analytical Level and 100% of the three-level sequences contained Analytical Level critical thinking responses. In Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, 23% of the two-level sequences contained advanced Analytical Level responses and 57% of the three-level sequences contained Analytical Level critical thinking responses.

There were 17 sequences, which remained at the Analytical Level, demonstrating the advanced level of critical thinking. The participants sustained this high level of critical thinking throughout the entire discussion of a topic. There were three Analytical Level sequences for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, twelve Analytical Level sequences for Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and two Analytical Level sequences for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The following excerpt from Stage Two – *The Holocaust* transcript dated January 14, 2009 portrays the advanced level of critical thinking at the Analytical Level:

David: *Why do you think Hitler thought that if he died, Germany should die with him because that's what he thought?*

Lydia: *He figures...*

David: *Because he thought he was Germany, he was what made Germany great because of his beliefs and...*

Lydia: *Like the Jews*

David: *I am Germany. If I die then Germany shouldn't be any more.*

Mrs. D: *Emma, didn't you have something that you read in another book that kind of goes with what he is talking about.*

Emma: *Kind of*

Mrs. D: *That you shared with me.*

Emma: *You had a question and you said you asked like why did Nazis join and stay. In my book, in this book it said...*

Mrs. D: *Tell us the name of the book.*

Emma: *It was Anne Frank, it says that Hitler made Germans feel like they were special, like nobody was better than Germans.*

Lydia: *You guys are lucky you guys are Germans, the highest rank. You're the best.*

David: *Oh yeah I remember seeing something on TV. It was, I don't remember which one it was because it was like kind of World War II it was one on all of the attempts to kill Hitler, it was like I don't remember if it was that one or the one after the hunt for Hitler but one of them showed he was, it was like young soldiers probably like Eric and he was just kind of lightly tapping them on the shoulder and looking really cheerful and he was making them feel it was all okay. He actually looked kind at that point.*

Lydia: *If he didn't then they would quit.*

David: *Probably*

Lydia: *Because he looks like, oh we're just killing a lot of Russians then they are going to be like, yeah, right. That's really joyful.*

David: *But he did. He was actually smiling, good job or something like that but he looked like he was really being nice.*

Lydia: *Because it said that they didn't know what they were fighting for whether the kids that came in were like Eric in Soldier X they didn't know.*

David: *They had to figure it out on their own.*

Lydia: *Or they would be like...*

David: *What are we doing this for and why? That's none of your business.*

Gary: *When a lot of kids the nine and 10 year olds, those kids didn't know what they were fighting for they were just going because they were forced to.*

David: *They probably just thought, guns that would be fun. I would have thought that. I might have, I don't know.*

Gary: *I would have been scared.*

David: *They probably didn't even know they were going to war.*

Lydia: *It's a field trip so get on this train.*

Sequence ends. Analytical Level (Advanced Level critical thinking)

The Probe/Analytical multi-level sequence evidenced the second advanced level of critical thinking. There were a total of eight sequences at this level: four sequences were found in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, three sequences were found in Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and one sequence was found in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The following excerpt from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* illustrated the participants' ability to answer a Probe Level question posed by the researcher at the advanced level of critical thinking, the Analytical Level. This sequence of response was precipitated by one of the participants reading a short dialogue from the novel.

Gary: *"Baby, we have no choice of what color we're born or who our parents are or whether we're rich or poor. What we do have is some choice over what we make of our lives once we're here." Mama cupped my face in her hands. "And I pray to God you'll make the best of yours." She hugged me warmly then and motioned me under the covers.*

Mrs. D: *Talk to me about that. What's your opinion of that guys?* **Probe Level**

Donald: *I thought it was kind of nice that she said that because she is not wanting to scare them that bad stuff will happen, but she wants to inform them to like change their lives and make sure none of this happens to you when you grow up. Like...* **Changes to Analytical Level**

Gary: *Have a good life.*

Donald: *Have a good life, live up north where no one can hurt you.*

Mrs. D: *She doesn't say they have to go up north.*

Emma: *She doesn't say you have to live up north, just make the best of your life.*

David: *I think it's one of those encouraging and it is almost like a speech, encouraging and just makes you feel better and there's another word but I can't remember what it was.*

Mrs. D: *And do you think that was good advice?*

Lydia: *I thought it was a really cool phrase because it was saying that some people are born with trials and tests and stuff where they can't choose of how hard life is going to be and if you're born some way like some people are born blind and they are born with so many tests and trials they are going to have a hard life trying to figure out how to find their way around if they are born blind and disabled people and stuff like Peter's in a wheelchair and he can't walk, he was born like that and that's going to give him tests and trials where he can't do as many things as other people can do because he can't walk.*

Mrs. D: *You're right, but he can do a lot of things and you make the best of what you have.*

Lydia: *You make sure you're thankful for life anyways.*

Sequence started with a Probe Level question by Mrs. D. and then responses were at the Analytical Level (all Advanced Level critical thinking)

These two excerpts illustrate the Advanced Level of critical thinking through oral response in literature circles that the participants articulated throughout the research study. Although not all the sequences represented this advanced level of critical thinking, the literature circle discussions provided evidence of the depth of critical thinking that was influenced by the differentiated reading curriculum.

Case Study Participants: Contributors to Literature Circle Discussions

David, Emma, Gary, Hunter, and Lydia were the five participants who completed all three stages of the literature circle discussion portion of the research study. David was an engaged and critical reader and one of the leaders in the literature circle discussions. Emma was an engaged and highly inquisitive reader but a reluctant participator in literature circle discussions. Gary was a focused surface reader and needed probing to explain his ideas and opinions as a responder. Harris read at a disengaged and surface level, but was a willing participant in the discussions. Lydia was a critical and focused reader and a leader in the literature circle discussions who was assertive in expressing her opinion. In the following sections each of the case study participants will be discussed individually as a contributor to the overall literature circle discussions involving critical thinking.

David: Discussion Leader

David was one of two leaders who emerged in the literature circle discussions. He was respectful of the other participants' opinions even when he disagreed with them. For example, in one of the discussions for Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, he did not agree with a statement that another participant had made:

David: *You had a good thought but I don't think that could happen because I don't think he is that kind of guy.*

He was also mindful of the fact that some of the participants were more reluctant to share and he tried to encourage them to voice their opinions as evidenced in a discussion for Stage One - *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*:

David: *What do you think is going to happen, Emma? What do you think is going to happen in the next two chapters?*

David was also an encourager to the other participants. In one of the discussions for Stage Two – The Holocaust, Harris had asked the question, “If you were a Jew back then and looked like a non-Jew would you wear the Star of David?”

David: *That’s a good question.*

Another of David’s leadership qualities indicated that if an issue was not fully resolved, he suggested the group return to that issue for resolution. In Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, he did not believe that a discussion concerning Matt and the issue of whether he had been “blunted” like other clones was resolved:

David: *I think we need to go back a little bit because I don’t think we’ve completely answered the question - why did Matt not get blunted. It wasn’t just because he was El Patron, because El Patron, now we know what they were used for and you would think that would make a difference of why, why they didn’t want him.*

Many of David’s responses during the literature circle discussions evidenced his critical thinking. Several examples from Stage Two – The Holocaust indicated his understanding of the plight of the Jews:

David: *They were just treated so badly that it took away all their hope and all their will to live. They just kind of wanted to die and they didn’t want to be there any more, it was just like torture. (Analytical Level)*

David: *I actually thought, maybe not from the beginning I would probably feel ashamed about myself because killing people just because they were different.*

(Analytical Level)

David: *Then the only problem is if all your friends look like Jews and they were being punished would you want them to go through that without you going through that. You don't want them to do that on their own, make them feel like you betrayed them. It's kind of a thought that you have to think about your friends and your family, what are they going through right now. Am I betraying them, am I torturing them for just being out there and them being in there and not having any freedom while I am just out on the street eating candy and sitting back.* (Analytical Level)

David's critical thinking and leadership skills throughout the literature circle discussions were evident in the manner in which he respected the other participants and their ideas, encouraged the reluctant contributors, and contributed his thoroughness in discussing questions and issues. David exhibited many instances of Advanced Level critical thinking throughout oral response in the literature circle discussions. He was able to verbalize his thoughts and provided valuable perceptions to the discussions. Following is an excerpt from the November 5, 2008 literature discussion of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This excerpt exemplifies David's leadership qualities:

David: *I wouldn't like to be the little kid having to wait all that time. He's been gone for all that time and I have no idea when he's going to be back.*

Donald: *If he comes back.*

Lydia: *It's probably not safe because they didn't have a dad with them.*

Harris: *And they didn't have a dad with them.*

David: *Stacey kind of acts like the dad so that he can ...*

Gary: *Their dad is going to go back to the railroad and help because he has Mr. Morrison and he doesn't have anybody because he didn't have anything to ...*

David: *I don't know if he needs protection.*

Donald: *You don't know if he is going to come back from the railroad. You don't really know how dangerous it is.*

Lydia: *I wonder if Mr. Morrison is going to stay when their dad comes back or if he is just going to be there while their dad's not there. Because if their dad comes back to stay then they might not need his help or they may like him enough that they are going to let him stay.*

Gary: *Good point.*

David: *What do you think is going to happen, Emily? What do you think is going to happen in the next two chapters?*

Lydia: *Do you think that Mr. Morrison is going to be a good guy, is he good, or does he have bad friends...*

David: *Or are we going to hear anything about him in the chapters*

Gary: *Or is he going to leave or something?*

Donald: *It might actually turn out that, he could turn out to be a bad guy and like he is spying on them waiting for the perfect time to strike when no one else is home, the kids are alone and*

Lydia: *I don't think the kids are usually there home alone. Big Ma is at home all the time.*

Donald: *But he might be waiting to strike them down one by one and to say that I have to go home for something and if he did that and he said he had to leave for a while to do something and then he could have done something really bad.*

Harris: *But he doesn't have anything to do because he lost his job and stuff and he came there and if it wasn't his house why did he go there?*

Lydia: *He didn't have any other jobs because no one believed him that he was good because he had gotten in that fight.*

David: *You had a good thought but I don't think that could happen because I don't think he is that kind of guy*

Mrs. D. *David you have to speak up. Could you repeat?*

David: *I am saying that is a good thought but I don't think it would really have anything to do because it's like one of those CSI shows and it's not really (he fades out)*

Lydia: *It's not possible.*

David: *And he doesn't seem like that kind of a person. He seems like he's really nice.*

This literature circle discussion excerpt documented David's Advanced Level critical thinking with responses at both the Probe and Analytical levels of response. He also exhibited leadership qualities exhibited by his response to solicit Emma's opinion and his respectful disagreement with other participants in the discussion.

Emma: Inquisitive but Reluctant Participant

Emma was an active listener during the literature circle discussions, but was reluctant to voice her opinions. Due to her inquisitive nature, many of her responses were posed as questions. For example in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* she asked:

Emma: *Do you think it was good for TJ to tell them that because maybe their mom or grandma was trying to keep that from them?*

Emma: *When Little Man said if that old bus driver would slow down maybe I wouldn't get so muddy, do you think he's doing that on purpose?*

Emma continued her inquisitiveness in Stage Two – *The Holocaust*:

Emma: *If the Germans, if the other Germans found out that those Germans were hiding Jews, could something bad happen to the Germans?*

Emma: *What if they all turn against him?*

In Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, Emma continued her inquisitive nature:

Emma: *So do they think they did that to him and that's why they treat him badly because, don't they usually put something in there to make them stupid?*

Emma: *What about Tom? Maria says she will marry Tom.*

Throughout the literature circle discussions, Emma listened to the discussions but was reluctant to share her critical thoughts and perceptions. Many of the responses that she did contribute were of an inquisitive nature indicating her involvement with the novels but searching for a deeper meaning. Emma's responses revealed very little evidence of advanced level critical thinking throughout the literature circle discussions. Following is an excerpt from the January 21, 2009 literature discussion on *The House of the Scorpion*.

Mrs. D: *Emma, you had an interesting comment when I quickly looked over your journal entries about the deaf man so talk about that and see what the rest of the group thinks.*

Emma: *Matt gets, he gets a piano and guitar or something teacher but the guy is deaf. (Basic Level)*

Lydia: *Mr. Ortega*

Emma: *Yeah and he's deaf so does he have to look at the notes and look at the keys that he is playing. (Basic Level)*

Lydia: *Well Beethoven was deaf in his older years and he still played the piano.*

David: *I don't think he was completely deaf.*

Mrs. D: *But I think she is wondering...*

Emma: *How could he tell that he was doing it right? (Basic Level)*

This short excerpt typified Emma's participation in oral response during literature circle discussions. She was reluctant to articulate her thoughts, but would participate if

asked to solicit her comments. Her responses were typical of her inquisitive nature and Basic Level critical thinking.

Gary: Willing Participant

Gary's demeanor during the literature circle discussions indicated that he was interested and actively engaged in the discussions. He approached me after the first literature circle discussion and asked if we would continue to have literature circle discussions. I replied that the discussions would take place approximately twice a week and then I asked him if he liked the discussion. He responded, *Yes, it was fun*. Gary was willing to offer responses to the discussions but needed probing to support his thoughts. The majority of his responses were the Basic Level thinking indicative of Engagement Level responses, but with probing there were instances where he raised his responses to Conjecture and Probe level thinking. For example, in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*:

Gary: *I thought it was pretty amazing that the bus driver tried to run those kids off the road.*

Gary: *Because every morning they try to leave earlier so they can get to the crossroads before the bus comes.*

Gary: *He might be part of the night riders and tell them and they might come.*

Gary's Engagement Level responses continued in Stage Two – The Holocaust.

Gary: *He's scared of that one kid.*

Gary: *And then Liesel found a book that was covered in ashes and it turned, like it was cold and she put it in her shirt and it turned really hot.*

If Gary was probed after giving an initial response, there were times when he was able to give a reason for his response.

Gary: *No*

Mrs. D: *Give me a reason, you can't just say no.*

Gary: *Because even if they didn't like the Jews, even though they were kids and they were Jews, maybe they didn't just feel right to go out there and blow the kids' heads off.*

Gary did contribute some short Analytical Level responses during this stage.

Gary: *It's kind of like the movie Valkyrie when they would call out their name and then they would go up there and then he would say, "Ready. Fire." And then they would shoot the guy.*

Gary: *When a lot of kids, the 9 and 10 year olds, those kids didn't know what they were fighting for they were just going because they were forced to.*

During Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, Gary's responses ranged in the Engagement, Conjecture and Probe Levels of response. He was involved in the literature circle discussions but did not show evidence of advanced level critical thinking.

Gary: *I have one more thing to say about the music. I thought it was pretty cool that Matt learned to play the guitar by himself, without anybody helping him.*

(Basic Level)

Gary: *It was cool. When I read about it I thought he was going to die. I thought that the gas was going to come out and kill him.* (Conjecture Level)

Gary: *Do you think it was a good thing that El Patron was dead?* (Probe Level)

Gary participated in the literature circle discussions but his responses did not provide evidence of the advanced analytical level thinking of critical thinking as he interacted with the participants in the literature circle discussions. He was willing to share but those responses consistently remained at the Engagement, Conjecture, and Probe levels. There were times when Gary responded with a simple yes or no and I would encourage him to provide his reasoning for the response. Following is an excerpt from the November 10, 2008, transcript of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Lydia: *What do you think is going to happen with TJ who said that Stacey looked like a fat preacher in his new coat?*

David: *I think he's...*

Lydia: *His expensive new coat...*

David: *I think...*

Lydia: *I think he's jealous because he couldn't pay for one.*

Several students: *Yeah*

Harris: *Yeah, TJ is not very nice at all.*

Gary: *I don't like him.* (Basic Level)

Mrs. D: *Why?*

Lydia: *He just tries to stir up trouble.*

Gary: *Yeah, every time...* (Basic Level)

Lydia: *It seems like he just wants more attention because he just does mean things and he goes up to the Wallace store to learn new dances and stuff and...*

David: *He offends the Logans and just acts like nothing happens.*

Gary: *Whenever Stacey and TJ meet he is always annoying them and ..* (Basic Level)

Emma: *Well they might still like him a little bit or they probably wouldn't even be friends with him.*

Lydia: *I don't know why he really likes him because he's always telling him knock it off, can it TJ that's annoying because he is teasing his little brother and trying to make him mad.*

Gary: *Making fun of Little Man.* (Probe Level)

This short excerpt demonstrated Gary's willingness to contribute to the literature circle discussions, but his responses did not reflect the advanced level of critical thinking. Gary's responses in this sequence revealed Basic Level thinking from three of the four responses generated in this sequence. When probed to provide reasoning for his response, he answered with a response at the Probe Level.

Harris: Active Participant

Harris was one of the participants who expressed his enjoyment of the literature circle discussions. After the first discussion of Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, he shared that the discussion was interesting and expressed his desire to continue these discussions. Harris participated in the literature circle discussions and his responses revealed all three levels of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. In Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* he was able to apply information from the Webquest that had been completed prior to reading and discussing the novel.

Harris: *The Jim Crow laws won't let them do that I don't think.*

He was also able to integrate information to construct conjectures as to his reasoning why a certain event had happened.

Harris: *That's probably why they hired Mr. Morrison so that nothing would happen to them if he looked so tough.*

Harris: *I think if his mom put the paper on it he'd probably take it but he wouldn't like it as much but he'd like it better.*

Harris was able to put himself in a character's position by analyzing a character's situation and many times indicating that he would have responded in the same manner.

Harris: *I wasn't surprised because I would have, too.*

Harris' responses demonstrated his ability to analyze information.

Harris: *Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. This is what white people will do to you so stay away from them.*

Harris also shared responses that indicated his willingness to probe deeper into the specific actions of a character.

Harris: *That just shows how their moms don't teach them about that stuff until they are older. Because Stacey was saying be quiet Cassie, you'll get yourself in trouble.*

In Stage Two – The Holocaust, Harris' responses indicated he was capable of expressing Advanced Level critical thinking while participating in the literature circle discussions.

Harris: *How would you feel if you were a soldier for Hitler?*

Harris: *Everyone lost their money so you had to go get stuff, steal stuff, you couldn't buy anything.*

Harris: *Because they didn't, probably because Hitler knew that some people didn't agree with him and he didn't want people disagreeing with him. He wanted everyone to agree so he kept a lot of things secret. That's why he took away books and everything.*

Harris' participation in the literature circle discussions for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, indicated that his responses encompassed all three levels of critical thinking from the advanced critical thinking at the Analytical Level to the basic level critical thinking found at the Engagement Level.

Harris: *Do you think Matt is using Fidelito and Chacho?* (Probe Level)

Harris: *Yeah, because maybe he could hear the vibrations from the piano because I heard there was some guy telling my parents about that like there was a deaf lady and she could tell if it was her husband or son who came who was walking towards her.* (Analytical Level)

Harris: *For the clones, they put drugs in them to make them dumb.*

(Engagement Level)

Harris: *Do you think Tam Lin will come to the rescue?* (Conjecture Level)

Harris was an active participant in the literature circle discussions. His responses indicated that he was engaged and willing to share his ideas. Harris was able to engage in advanced critical thinking as evidenced by his responses. Following is an excerpt from the November 17, 2008 literature discussion of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This excerpt exemplifies Harris' participation in discussions:

David: *We've talked about this cover picture pretty much every discussion we've had. So I think I'm going to bring it up right now. Do you think that they're going to have, that because of what Mr. Morrison did and how he just kind of lifted the truck up, do you think there is going to be trouble that has to do with this?*

Harris: *Yeah. They're just digging their hole deeper and deeper and deeper.*

David: *And also it's getting to the end of the story and this hasn't happened yet.*

Mrs. D: *I don't understand who is digging their hole deeper and deeper?*

Harris: *The Logans because they keep doing more and more stuff to the white people that makes the white people mad.*

Lydia: *Cause there's no way out of your hole if you dig way down with a straight path and you can't get back up. You dig like this then you can climb back up like stairs (shows with her hands) but you can't come back out of a hole like this. Digging straight down they can't have a way back up.*

Mrs. D: *Well had they done anything wrong?*

David: *No*

Harris: *No, but the white people had done really bad things.*

Mrs. D: *But what?*

Harris: *But to the white people they had done really bad things.*

Mrs. D: *Like what?*

Harris: *Uncle Hammer had moved the one guy's truck.*

Gary: *That was Mr. Morrison.*

Harris: *Yeah, Mr. Morrison moving one guy's truck.*

This excerpt documented Harris' levels of critical thinking with responses at the Probe Level, which exhibited an Advanced Level of critical thinking, Intermediate Level critical thinking at the Conjecture Level and Basic Level critical thinking with Engagement Level responses. He was willing to contribute to the oral discussions but did not raise his thoughts to the advanced level of critical thinking found in the Analytical Level.

Lydia: Discussion Leader

Lydia was very involved in the literature circle discussions. She provided insightfulness to many of the discussions. For example, in Stage One – *Roll of Thunder*,

Hear My Cry, she compared her feelings about a tragic situation that she was aware of to emphasize the feelings of one of the characters in the novel:

Lydia: *I was going to say because you don't have to know someone and to like someone to feel sorry for them because I don't think she feels sorry for him, she's just sad for him because if you think about the accident with Colby Jones (pseudonym) and they think that he's drown, I don't know him and I couldn't say that I ever like him because I never knew him but I am still sad for him.*

Lydia: *I thought it was a really cool phrase because it was saying that some people are born with trials and tests and stuff where they can't choose of how hard life is going to be and if you're born some way like some people are born blind and they are born with so many tests and trials they are going to have a hard life trying to figure out how to find their way around if they are born blind and disabled people and stuff like Pete's (pseudonym) in a wheelchair and he can't walk, he was born like that and that's going to give him tests and trials where he can't do as many things as other people can do because he can't walk.*

Lydia continued to demonstrate the Advanced Level of critical thinking in many of her responses to Stage Two – The Holocaust.

Lydia: *Because the Germans had blue eyes and blond hair and they wanted everybody to be blond haired, blue-eyed Germans because they thought the Germans were somehow racially superior.*

Lydia: *This was just a little later. Don't you think that they should have already figured out that they, that there wasn't any one that was lower because they figured out eventually that the blacks weren't any lower than the white people.*

Lydia: *Because like the kid in Soldier X also said that he had always dreamed of being a soldier for the German army and he thought that was, that he would be a hero if he did that, but I think it's more like being a murderer.*

Lydia's responses in Stage Three – *House of the Scorpion* represented her ability to connect with the characters in the story and put herself in their position.

Lydia: *You could scare people so bad with that. I love scaring people. That would be like a dream.*

Lydia: *Well Beethoven was deaf in his older years and he still played the piano.*

Lydia's contribution to the literature circle discussions provided leadership and insightfulness. She was able to take situations from the various novels and relate those to situations with which she was familiar. Her Advanced Level critical thinking provided a valuable contribution to the discussions. Following is an excerpt from the January 21, 2009 literature discussion of *The House of the Scorpion*. This excerpt exemplified Lydia's leadership qualities as she continues to articulate her beliefs:

Emma: *Matt gets, he gets a piano and guitar or something and the teacher but the guy is deaf.*

Lydia: *Mr. Ortega. (Basic Level)*

Emma: *Yeah and he's deaf so does he have to look at the notes and look at the keys that he is playing?*

Lydia: *Well, Beethoven was deaf in his older years and he still played the piano. (Analytical Level)*

David: *I don't think he was completely deaf.*

Mrs. D. *But I think she is wondering...*

Emma: *How could he tell that he was doing it right?*

Lydia: *If you can play a song without looking at the keys or closing your eye then he can just look at it and say that's right. (Analytical Level)*

David: *He can just look at what Matt's playing and he knows what sound each of the notes make.*

Lydia: *Some people can hear that and he says, or he said good job because he knows he's doing good because he knows it sounds good. (Analytical Level)*

David: *He doesn't say good job, I think it's because he's a clone and he doesn't really want to congratulate a clone. .*

Lydia: *Yeah, it's like going good dog, good dog. (Analytical Level)*

David: *He knows he played it right cause he can tell...*

Lydia: *I don't care if anyone told him. (Basic Level)*

Mrs. D: *I think that sometimes people who are deaf can hear vibrations and I think that if he had his hand on the piano at all he would have been able to...*

Harris: *Yeah, because maybe he could hear the vibrations from the piano because I heard there was some guy telling my parents about that like there was a deaf lady and she could tell if it was her husband or son who came who was walking towards her.*

Lydia: *Yeah, there are some blind people that are like, that where they can hear your footsteps and if it is a heavy footstep then it is probably someone who weighs more than a light footstep which is probably a kid. (Analytical Level)*

Lydia's leadership skills were evidenced by her continued active involvement with the literature circle discussion. She provided insight into the discussion by connecting Beethoven with the deaf piano teacher. Her responses in this sequence ranged from Basic Level thinking with Engagement Level responses to the Advanced Level critical thinking as articulated with her Analytical Level responses.

Literature circle discussions provided participants the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and perceptions of the text with others. This interaction with other participants in a small group setting is vital to increasing critical thinking of oral

response. Participants are challenged to present and defend their understanding of the text, as well as probe the other participants to rationalize their beliefs and opinions.

Teacher Perception of Differentiated Reading for Gifted Readers

An important final aspect of this research study was documenting the perceptions of Mrs. Cook as she experienced the instructional strategy of differentiation with the fifth grade-reading curriculum for all readers in her fifth grade classroom. Mrs. Cook was asked to keep a reflective journal of her thoughts and perceptions during the research period, as well as pre- and post- interviews conducted in order to provide information concerning her beliefs related to the teaching of reading both before and after reading differentiation had been implemented in her classroom. I held regular weekly meetings with Mrs. Cook to discuss lesson plans, any concerns that had surfaced, and her ongoing perceptions concerning the differentiated reading curriculum.

Reflective Journal

Mrs. Cook was requested to keep a reflective journal of her thoughts and perceptions of the research study. I encouraged her to include both her positive and negative comments in the journal. I explained to her that I wanted this to be as accurate a description of her beliefs about differentiation as possible. When other professionals read this study, they would need to understand both the strengths/weaknesses and successes/failures of implementing a differentiated reading curriculum. Mrs. Cook recorded her thoughts and perceptions in a loose-leaf notebook journal (Appendix T). The reflective journal entries were dated from October 27, 2008 to January 30, 2009. Her direct written journal comments are reflected through italics in the following section.

Prior to beginning this research study, the class had been reading *Through My Eyes* by Rudy Bridges (1999). This novel is about Ruby Bridges, the first black child to attend a New Orleans public elementary school. Ruby Bridges documented her year at this school, including the realization that everything happening around her was because she was a black child in a white school. Excerpts from newspaper accounts and statements from Ruby's parents were also included. Mrs. Cook referenced this novel as she prepared the students for the first stage of the research study. She explained that part of the class would be reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor and a second group would be reading *The Friendship* by Mildred Taylor. At that time four of the students left with the special education teacher to the resource room for their instruction. The gifted readers came together at the back of the room with the researcher while the remaining 11 students remained with Mrs. Cook.

Mrs. Cook commented in her reflective journal on October 27, 2008 that she was dissatisfied with her introduction to the two historical fiction novels. She was particularly worried about the students' perceptions of splitting the class into three separate groups as it was obvious which students were in the low group, which students were in the middle group, and which students were in the gifted group. She referenced the fact that *it feels just like when I was a kid*. However, as the week progressed, Mrs. Cook expressed a growing degree of satisfaction with what was transpiring in her classroom. She commented that she *loved* the look of her classroom as she observed different students completing different tasks. Some of the students were conversing, some of the students were on computers, and some of the students were reading with the teacher. Her comment at this point was, *That's what I like to picture my room and*

students as being ... interactive, motivated students, questioning, and thinking. Mrs. Cook articulated concern with handling three groups on her own. She conveyed mixed emotions during this first week and stated that even though the reading was going smoothly and she loved the look of the classroom, the noise *bugged* her and she needed to adjust to more activity in the classroom.

Mrs. Cook continued to verbalize contentment with the progress she was observing in her classroom. On November 3, 2008, she commented that the group she was facilitating was *flowering*. The students were completing the reading assignments and sharing their ideas during the discussions. She also stated that the students were engaged in more writing and attributed this to one of the benefits of team teaching. Mrs. Cook wrote an interesting comment in her journal concerning how she believed *the pendulum in reading had swung. But, it's with novels and discussions. Not basals and workbook pages.*

Perceptions shared by Mrs. Cook during the week of November 10, 2008 revealed her contentment with the progress she was witnessing in the classroom and a confidence with the overall differentiated plan for the entire reading block. Three or four days a week Mrs. Cook began the reading time with a short mini-lesson, approximately 15 minutes, in which all students participated in practicing a reading skill that was necessary for them to understand. These mini-lessons were presented in a variety of formats and she believed they were effective for all ability levels. Once again, Mrs. Cook expressed concern about handling three separate groups by herself and stated *the thought of the planning is overwhelming.*

During the week of November 17, 2008 Mrs. Cook expressed a variety of emotions. At one point, total frustration arose with students' unwillingness to focus and work independently. She commented, *That's when I think I can't manage different groups doing different things.* It was at this point that a feeling of incompetency in her ability to manage students engaged in differentiated activities surfaced. As the week progressed she felt disconnected from the four students who left the classroom every day with the special education teacher and was unclear as to the progress of these students. Mrs. Cook did say that she had a *sense* of what was going on with the gifted readers because they were in the classroom and she could hear parts of their dialogue during the literature circle discussions. She then commented that she believed there were two barriers of differentiating work: (1) planning/management/time and (2) her ability or willingness to easily relinquish guidance for her students. She did not view this as detrimental, but she knew that it made an impact on her views of differentiation. On November 21, 2008 Mrs. Cook admitted *there is nothing about this I don't think is effective. What I have come to realize is that I have to be able to do this on my own.* She further commented that even though she had attempted differentiating in the past, she was gaining confidence and was ready to integrate effective differentiation strategies into her teaching.

Mrs. Cook's entry on November 24, 2008 revealed a personal struggle. *Am I utilizing my time in the best way, or am I using my time to continually plan ahead?* She check marked this entry and commented that she wanted to revisit this mode of thinking.

As the research study continued, Mrs. Cook's entries for the week of December 1, 2008 disclosed her perceptions of Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.* At the

conclusion of this stage the entire class watched the movie “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.” Mrs. Cook verbalized her satisfaction with the decision to bring all students together to summarize the theme from the two related novels and then provide a compare/contrast writing assignment that they all completed. She realized there would be a variety of writing abilities, but believed the continuity this assignment provided was appropriate.

Mrs. Cook appreciated that Stage Two of the study provided a second strategy for differentiating. At this point the class was divided into two groups, the gifted readers and the remaining 15 students. She expressed satisfaction with the comfort and routine that had been established in the first stage of the study and stated, *I like it that we have gradual steps, and that we're trying some different things. It's so much easier to ease into some comfort and routine, then I gain confidence and can really process what I like, what I want to continue, and what I'd like to try.* This confidence provided her with the incentive to undertake additional differentiation strategies. This feeling of instructional satisfaction changed by the end of the week and she attributed this uncertainty to the fact that she now had 15 students in her group. With the inclusion of four additional students, Mrs. Cook began to question the best method of handling the struggling readers. She stated, *So do I leave them behind or keep waiting and slowing everyone else down?* This dilemma was further exacerbated by the fact that she could hear the group of gifted readers and their motivation to keep reading and complete assignments. She even commented in her journal that she wanted to *record* the researcher's comments to the group of gifted readers. Her final question for this week was, *Does she have to be there to keep motivating, guiding, or could they do it on their own?*

The week of December 8th marked the midway point of the research study. Mrs. Cook indicated her frustration with the gifted readers who did not stay focused on their reading when I was not present. She commented that it was vital to establish rules for students when they were working independently. Mrs. Cook's frustrations continued with the four struggling readers and their unwillingness to complete reading assignments or participate in discussions. She mentioned that these students *just sit and wait for others to carry them along*. Again she reiterated that they were slowing the progress of the rest of the students. Mrs. Cook believed the *leaders* of her group of students were having difficulty encouraging the *non-talkers* to contribute to the discussions. At this point Mrs. Cook commented, *Discussion in our group was good, but I think I'll try to divide into smaller groups for the next book*.

Mrs. Cook's dialogue in her reflective journal during the week of December 15th revealed her anticipation for the next stage of the study and her desire to incorporate a new concept for the 15 students in her group. She reflected, *What would it be like to let 17 read on own and set goals for themselves – maybe 15 – and keep 6 on a plan and meet with them daily?* Mrs. Cook cogitated on the fact that several students in her classroom were *sharp students, hard workers, and deep thinkers* and wondered whether they would benefit from the challenges presented in the group comprised of gifted readers.

Comments during the week of January 5, 2009 disclosed Mrs. Cook's continuation of planning and preparing for the upcoming weeks and Stage Three of the study. She expressed satisfaction with having the three stages of the study center around themes as this assisted with her planning. Due to the fact that her group of 15 students completed their novel prior to the group of gifted readers completing their novels, Mrs.

Cook located an activity that transitioned her group of students from the Holocaust to the theme of “Making Choices.” She commented that, *a lot of good things happen when you’re partnering!* Mrs. Cook pondered the possibility of providing her group of students a choice from two or three pre-selected novels.

Comments from Mrs. Cook during the week of January 12, 2009 indicated her comfort with team teaching. *I appreciate how flexible you are, Judy, and that I can teach and reteach needed skills and you’re OK with that. I don’t think this team could work if there wasn’t a certain degree of professionalism between both parties. And flexibility – a must!!* Mrs. Cook expressed confidence in her decision to incorporate three separate groups and provide her 15 students a choice in the novel they would read during the last stage of the study. She further stated, *One group who is “tough” (struggle academically or don’t keep up) was encouraging to watch. They wanted to read together – they were helping each other, discussing, etc. in their own way and pace.*

Mrs. Cook’s comments in the eleventh week, January 19th through 23rd revealed that she was beginning to have some *definition* to her reading instruction. She reiterated her satisfaction with the incorporation of a variety of mini-lessons designed to present reading skills necessary for the state mandated testing and the fact that this provided more time for students to read in class. Mrs. Cook mentioned that she was requiring fewer activities for students to complete, but expressed concern about student accountability from their reading. She indicated that *planning is harder. In fact, just keeping track of where each group is at gets challenging.* Mrs. Cook realized that when differentiation is incorporated into the curriculum, it means relinquishing some of the control and admitted that she thought planning would be easier if she would *let go a little more.*

As the research study neared completion, Mrs. Cook's journal entries for the week of January 26th disclosed an attitude of disorganization, but also a vision of clarity as to how differentiation could be implemented into her reading classroom. She stated that it was disorganization on her part that led her to formulate a plan for the strategies and methods that would work well for her, as well as a weekly rubric to assist in assessing the students. Mrs. Cook was also encouraged with the ongoing dynamics of the lower reading group. She stated, *In my "low" group, 2 boys have stepped up to be the leaders. One is a boy with an IEP who has some anger/pouting issues. The other is one who came to 5th grade not putting effort into any academics, being dishonest, and with behavior issues. And, they're leading discussion group well!*

Mrs. Cook's reflective journal provided her the opportunity to ruminate and communicate her insights about the incorporation of differentiation into the reading curriculum. Her comments revealed:

- Frustration with students and herself.
- Empowerment to search for solutions and reassess previously held beliefs.
- Confidence in her ability to manage several reading groups due to implementing differentiation one step at a time.
- Observance of active involvement of students in the reading process and students demonstrating leadership roles.
- Agreement that differentiation was beneficial to all students.

Weekly Meetings

Mrs. Cook and I met in her classroom for approximately 30 minutes each week to discuss a variety of issues, concerns, progress, and differentiated lesson plans for the following week. We initially scheduled these meetings for Wednesdays at 3:30, but flexibility was necessary due to conflicts in our schedules and situations that would require immediate attention by either Mrs. Cook or myself. In addition to the weekly meetings, Mrs. Cook and I frequently visited informally throughout the week about the progress of the gifted readers, the participants' response journals, the literature circle discussions, and any concerns that had surfaced. Mrs. Cook and I had professional respect and rapport while collaborating effectively. Mrs. Cook's direct comments are italicized in this section.

Our first weekly meeting was held on November 5, 2008. Mrs. Cook and I shared our perspectives on the first week and a half of the differentiated instruction. The gifted readers had participated in their first literature circle discussion on this day and Mrs. Cook commented that she had heard small parts of the conversation and was pleased with how they had handled the discussion. We discussed the issue of providing prompts for the gifted readers to use in their response journals and decided that at this point we would not provide prompts but allow the gifted readers to *free write*. Lesson plans were reviewed for the following week. When asked about her understanding of differentiation from this past week, Mrs. Cook replied that *differentiation is not a new concept, it has been around for quite some time, but it is the new buzzword. Differentiation is rewarding. Students make more gains because groups that are ready can keep on flowing through.*

At the meeting on November 11th, a brief overview of the lessons plans for the remainder of Stage One - *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was reviewed to coordinate the dates when all students would be completing the novels they were reading. Due to the fact that the gifted readers were reading at a faster pace and would complete the novel prior to Mrs. Cook's group, it was decided that a culminating activity should be incorporated. Mrs. Cook stated that there was a movie for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and she wanted to show this to the entire class at the end of the novel. Both Mrs. Cook and myself commented about the gifted readers' response journal entries and the fact that we thought they were not putting enough effort into their writing. I decided I would continue to visit with them about the expectations for their responses and encourage participants to provide more insight into their journals. When discussing differentiation, Mrs. Cook voiced her concern, *How does a classroom teacher handle all the discussions?* She believed that management of the various groups would be challenging if she did not have assistance from outside resources like the special education teacher or gifted facilitator.

Mrs. Cook's comment at the weekly meeting on November 19, 2008 was that she believed the differentiated reading was progressing *wonderfully*. She reflected on the fact that her group of students was reading faster and was not sure whether this was attributed to our self-imposed deadline for the end of the first stage or if this was a result of the pacing of the gifted readers impacting and motivating Mrs. Cook's group. She also said, *I don't feel like I have to have as many activities. There seems to be a lot more enthusiasm, more good discussion.* Mrs. Cook mentioned that due to the quality of the students' response to the literature, both in their response journals and discussions, she

believed the students were involved and comprehended the text. She said that her perspective concerning grouping of students was changing gradually.

When asked what she envisioned for her classroom when the research study was finished, she responded that she would like to see this differentiated type of format continue. She did express concern about how she would manage different groups on her own and wondered if either the special education teacher or the gifted facilitator would be available to team teach two days each week. Mrs. Cook was advised of the progress the gifted readers were making on the culminating activity. The gifted readers were designing a Jeopardy game to be used by the rest of the class and Mrs. Cook was asked to divide the students into four teams. There was also a concern about Emma and the mini-lessons that she missed as a result of her coming 15 minutes late to reading class each day. A brief discussion about Stage Two – The Holocaust and what types of pre-reading should be conducted before the gifted readers began reading their novels. The time period for Stage Two was discussed due to the fact that it would extend over the Holiday break. It was decided that we would continue Stage Two for approximately a week to a week and a half after the break.

At the following meeting on December 1, 2008 Mrs. Cook and I reviewed the gifted readers' final writing assignment and assigned grades. I solicited Mrs. Cook's comments concerning her overall perception of Stage One- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Mrs. Cook articulated her observance of students actively involved in their respective reading groups during the discussions. She had witnessed an increase in motivation from the students and stated, *I would feel more able to do it next year because I just know that with the right training of routine I could get a group doing it. It's more*

feasible, it's more in reach. Mrs. Cook also said, *Even if someone could help with the lower kids that would be a big asset. It has also made me realize I could find a person somewhere.* She voiced her receptiveness to students reading different novels at one time and believed that with the guidance she had received, it was not as overwhelming to plan for next year.

At the December 10, 2008 meeting, Stage Two – The Holocaust was underway. Mrs. Cook expressed frustration with four students who were now incorporated in her group and stated, *It drives me crazy to see the lethargy of the four special education students.* When asked why these four students had rejoined her group instead of remaining with the special education teacher, she commented that she believed the book she had chosen was appropriate for these four students and she had decided to consolidate these two groups into one. She further commented, *I knew that the four students could read the book but it changed the dynamics of the group. Three of the total group did not read. The four special education students did not participate in group discussions and that is frustrating.* At this point Mrs. Cook and I brainstormed what she might do differently the next time this unit was presented. Mrs. Cook also stated that on Tuesdays when I was not available for the reading time, several of the gifted readers did not use their time wisely and we agreed that I would discuss this issue with the gifted readers. I then commented that the gifted readers were exceeding my expectations for the number of pages they were reading and Mrs. Cook agreed that this was a positive outcome of the differentiated reading curriculum. Mrs. Cook advised that her reading group would be finished with their novel by the holiday break and she would incorporate other reading activities with her students until the gifted readers had completed this stage.

Due to the hectic schedule of the week before the holiday break, we had a very short meeting on December 16, 2008. We quickly reviewed the progress of both groups and Mrs. Cook stated that her students would finish their novel by the holiday break and the group of gifted readers would require one more week to complete Stage Two – The Holocaust. Mrs. Cook asked if the groups could not meet on Friday as she had special activities planned for the last day. We discussed the fact that flexibility is key to team-teaching.

Our January 5, 2009 meeting began with a brief summary of the reading that had been completed by each of the gifted readers during this second stage. Three of the five gifted readers were on track to exceed the minimum requirement set for reading and the other two students would meet the minimum requirement. Mrs. Cook expressed her desire for me to continue coming into the classroom once the research study was completed and I told her that my schedule would allow for me to participate twice a week during the reading block. Once again Mrs. Cook expressed concern about her ability to handle several groups by herself. *I just think about how different groups would work without other teachers. It is hard for me to let go and have students do more on their own.* Mrs. Cook also stated that she would need additional time during the reading block to incorporate formative testing as the students prepared for state assessments. Once again schedule flexibility was discussed.

In our meeting for the week of January 12th, Mrs. Cook commented on her initial attempt at providing choice for her group of students and setting up three separate reading groups. She shared that she was excited to watch how this unfolded over the next couple of weeks. I told her that my group would have their final discussion for Stage Two – The

Holocaust on Wednesday and then we would be ready to start Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, the last stage of the study.

At the January 19th meeting, Mrs. Cook expressed a feeling of inadequacy in managing three different groups. She attributed part of this to the fact that she had been home with a sick child on the previous Wednesday and that Monday there had been no school. She stated, *I think because I was gone a day I feel like I've lost "control."* I shared that the group of gifted readers was keeping up with the faster paced reading assignments.

Discussion at the January 29th meeting focused on a situation involving the group of gifted readers. They were immersed with reading *The House of the Scorpion*, yet many of the gifted readers were reading beyond the reading assignment and that was having a detrimental affect on the literature circle discussions. The gifted readers were unclear as to what they could discuss because they could not remember what was in the actual reading assignment and what events were further in the science fiction novel. As Mrs. Cook and I discussed this issue, we both agreed that it was a challenging dilemma with no satisfactory solution. Mrs. Cook said, *I am excited that the students want to read but then the discussion becomes another management problem.* The quality of the discussions declined and we also noticed that the quality of their written responses provided little evidence of higher-level thinking. The gifted readers were more concerned about discovering what happened next in the book instead of applying critical thinking to what they had read. We talked about the fact that the research study would be completed the following week.

The weekly meetings provided a rich source of information and insight into Mrs. Cook's perceptions concerning the implementation of differentiation into the reading curriculum. The professional rapport that was established between Mrs. Cook and myself facilitated our discussion of successes/failures and strengths/weaknesses that surfaced throughout the research study. The following list provides a summary of these insights gleaned during the weekly meetings.

- Management of groups and assignments.
- Increase in students' motivation and enthusiasm for reading.
- Quality of literature circle discussions.
- Frustration with apathy in select students.
- Relinquishment of control and change of philosophy towards teaching.
- Differentiation of reading instruction as beneficial and rewarding.

Final Interview

On February 4, 2009 I conducted the final interview with Mrs. Cook. I reminded her about the question we discussed each week: *What did you learn this week that has impacted your understanding of differentiation?* I wanted her to reflect on this as she communicated with me (Appendix U). Mrs. Cook stated that over the course of the research study, she had a variety of thoughts and they were continually changing based on circumstances in the classroom that day.

Mrs. Cook was pleased with the progression of the three stages in this study. She appreciated the fact that the study was initiated by incorporating three groups and three different teachers managing each of the groups and believed this was a valuable introduction to providing differentiation into the reading classroom. She acknowledged

this gave her confidence in approaching and building on the other strategies that were integrated during the course of the research study. As we moved into Stage Two – The Holocaust and there were only two groups Mrs. Cook stated, *As we progressed and then went to you had a group, and then I have one group that incorporated all the rest of the kids and Mrs. Harris didn't have a group anymore then I could see some difficulties of kids not finishing, it became more of the management things again.* Even though Mrs. Cook said that management was a key issue for her, she knew that what she was observing in her classroom—students actively engaged in a variety of quality literature with separate goals - was the ultimate goal for her classroom.

As the study progressed into Stage Three, Mrs. Cook gained more confidence and decided to set up three reading groups with the remaining 15 students in the class. With her expressions of frustration, she also experienced success with students and a sense of accomplishment because she had implemented three groups on her own. Once again Mrs. Cook stated that managing the various groups was a struggle and dealing with students who were not keeping pace with the reading was an ongoing issue. She did not want the rest of the students to be detrimentally affected by the unwillingness of these students to complete assignments, but was unsure how to handle this issue. Mrs. Cook said, *Some of the other groups didn't use their time as well and so that's another thing that I pulled kids out of their group if I thought they weren't participating and taking it seriously and doing what they needed to do.* Mrs. Cook believed this was an effective method for approaching this situation and was confident in her plan for dealing with these issues in the future.

When asked if she thought the various groups were able to lead and maintain appropriate discussions by themselves without teachers present, Mrs. Cook responded, *What I found was the group that I thought would struggle the most did the best job with it and took on that leadership and responsibility.* Mrs. Cook compared this group of students to a baseball team when she said, *if you are practicing with team members that are your level or below it is hard to make gains, but if you are practicing with team members who perform at a higher level, then those players begin playing at the higher level.* She stated that she was not sure if it was a competitive issue or due to the fact that students were not all in the same discussion group, thus affording different students the opportunity to become leaders or organizers of a group. In this situation, these students did not appear to be as intimidated. She wondered if these students were more inclined to take on the leadership responsibility because the *really smart students* were not in the group to pass judgment. Even though she had not witnessed this type of behavior from the high ability students, she questioned whether that was the perception of the students who were quiet and less confident.

Mrs. Cook also recognized the achievement level of the group of gifted readers. She admitted that even though she had not attended to many of their discussions, she was amazed at the writing assignments these students were completing. Mrs. Cook said, *Some of the written pieces that I would see in their folders, I mean I was amazed that they were doing rough drafts, building. I was impressed with their writing and who applied their skills and who didn't and who could express themselves and the different levels that they expressed themselves at.*

While she admitted there were different levels within the gifted readers group, she detected evidence that they were all utilizing more application of the skills they had previously been taught. When asked whether she saw a different level of comprehension from the rest of the students in the class she stated,

I think it is almost a difference in comprehension level because those kids were more active. And as they expressed their comprehension, or they took on a leadership role to maybe be the leader of their discussion group I was amazed at the questions they would ask each other and at what they would gain or how they would share their thoughts in comparison to what another student had written.

Another change that Mrs. Cook observed in her students was their enthusiasm to increase the length of their reading assignments. She attributed part of this motivation for increased reading to the fact that there was more of a *flow* when the students read more and completed fewer activities and participated in discussions every day. She stated, *They were more interested, they were more vested in what they were reading.* In fact, one of the groups requested a longer reading assignment than what Mrs. Cook had initially planned. Mrs. Cook's original plans incorporated discussions two to three times a week for the middle group, but stated,

The middle group, while they would wait for me to organize groups which took about five minutes every day or more, they stuck themselves in a group and started discussing every day without being told. I thought that was kind of neat.

Mrs. Cook reflected on her attempts at differentiation in the past and stated that when she met obstacles and struggled with managing various groups of students involved in various activities she was overwhelmed and always returned to whole-class activities because it was easier to manage. She believed that teachers were reluctant to incorporate differentiation because it was a daunting responsibility and they struggled with discovering solutions to problems independently. She further commented,

And honestly, I mean I know other people, maybe you know would see a big picture faster, but I probably wouldn't until I got brave enough to do groups of my own and put myself in that situation where I knew it would be frustrating so I could figure out some solutions that I wouldn't want any less than three months... I think part of the reason that I think it was successful is the way that we kind of tempered ourselves into it. It wasn't just dive in.

Starting small and achieving success was important in building her confidence to continue differentiating. Mrs. Cook stated that as the study progressed and more strategies were introduced, she was willing to view the problems that arose as challenges with which she could discover solutions.

She attributed much of the success she acquired with differentiation from team collaboration. She believed that an effective team has flexibility and a willingness to share struggles and solutions. Discussing issues that arise is very important in acquiring confidence with differentiation strategies. Mrs. Cook stated,

When we split into this last group I would say nine tenths of the time it has been frustrating, but in the frustration it has made me solve problems and made me figure out

what I would do differently instead of just being overwhelmed and saying I'm not going to do this anymore.

Mrs. Cook affirmed that this study had assisted her in executing a more effective reading program for her students. She reiterated that even though she incorporated short mini-lessons in the past to teach the necessary reading skills and strategies, she believed she fine-tuned those lessons to reflect a variety of techniques that better served the students. She also witnessed benefits in allowing students to read more with fewer activities as this developed *flow* and the students remained interested and motivated in the reading.

Mrs. Cook's experience with providing a differentiated reading curriculum to her fifth grade students provided insight into a classroom teacher's perception of differentiation. These perceptions are important for administrators and teachers to understand as they incorporate differentiation strategies into the classroom. The following list provides a summary of these insights on planning and implementing differentiated reading.

- Initiate small steps and build on these to instill confidence in the classroom teacher's ability to differentiate.
- Provide team teaching for a minimum of three months to ensure competency with differentiation.
- View frustrations as a rich source of solution finding.
- Ensure success through flexibility.
- Expect students will exceed expectations.

- Relinquish some responsibilities to the students to ensure their success and aid in management concerns.

Summary

A qualitative case study was conducted to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions. The study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. Multiple forms of data were collected including the gifted participants' written response journals and their oral response in literature circle discussions. Observations, interviews, and the teacher's reflective journal provided valuable insights into the differentiated reading instruction process.

Analysis of the reader response journal data provided the emergence of ten categories for written response as indicated in the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*: Advanced Critical Thinking Level: (1) Synthesis, (2) Character Affinity, (3) Character Scrutiny, (4) Evaluative Inquiry; Intermediate Critical Thinking Level: (5) Inference, (6) Image Construction, (7) Author's Writing Technique, (8) Prediction, and Basic Critical Thinking Level: (9) Ambiguity and (10) Engagement. Literature circle discussion analysis further provided the emergence of four levels of oral critical thinking response as indicated in the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*: (1) Analytical; (2) Probe; (3) Conjecture; and (4) Engagement, as well as Multi-Tiered sequences of response discussions.

Data collected from the teacher sources provided insight into Mrs. Cook's journey toward differentiation in reading. She shared her frustrations, concerns, triumphs, and successes as she engaged in various strategies of differentiation. Her willingness to incorporate what she was learning into her reading curriculum may provide valuable information for other professionals who may be willing to delve into differentiation.

The following chapter will discuss the findings related to the results reported in this chapter. The impact of differentiation on gifted readers as well as the classroom teacher's understanding of this strategy will be examined through the research questions that provided a foundation for this study. Suggestions for future research will be provided to extend a research base for examining the results of implementing differentiated reading instruction. Implications for instructional classroom practice will be addressed as it relates to differentiating the reading curriculum in a regular classroom setting.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the findings related to the influence differentiation had on five gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. This study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. Discussion of the findings that emerged through analysis of participants' written response to literature, oral response from the transcripts of literature circle discussions, interviews of participants, reflective journal and weekly meetings with Mrs. Cook, and observational field notes identified the ten categories of written response, the four levels of oral response, and the teacher perceptions of differentiation that emerged. Implications of these findings for classroom practice and implications for future research are presented.

Summary of the Study

The reality of today's classroom is that teachers must provide an appropriately challenging education to a diverse student population. The academic skills in a single classroom may range from one to two years below grade level to several years above grade level. In addition, teachers are held accountable to teach a set of standards in order to ensure that students reach a minimum level of proficiency. In light of these expectations the classroom teacher must establish a process to fulfill his/her responsibility to provide the necessary educational requirements and, at the same time, address the needs of the diverse students in the classroom. The one-size-fits-all method of teaching is neither an appropriate practice, nor the most effective. Providing students

with an appropriate education is vital in ensuring that all students, including the gifted students, meet their potential. Due to the fact that gifted students spend the majority of time in the regular classroom, educators must evaluate the methods being implemented to ensure that the needs of the gifted students in the regular classroom are being met. This study explored how a differentiated reading curriculum influenced five gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions. The study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom.

This qualitative case study was conducted in a PreK-8 school in a rural Midwest setting. The study was conducted between October 27, 2008 and February 4, 2009. The researcher was in the classroom on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday during the seventy-minute reading block. A group of five gifted readers was followed through all three stages of this research study: Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The participants' written responses to literature were photocopied, typed, and analyzed. The oral response from the literature circle discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. In addition the participants' interviews were recorded and transcribed providing further documentation. The classroom teacher provided valuable insight into her perceptions of the differentiation process through the use of a reflective journal, weekly meetings, and pre- and post- interviews. Observational and reflective field notes were also kept throughout the research period. The various sources of data provided valuable insight

into how differentiation influenced five gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience.

Findings

The focus of this study was to document how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience as they responded to quality literature at appropriately challenging levels through the use of response journals and literature circles. The study also documented a fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom. Data collected and analyzed from the written response of the gifted readers revealed a hierarchical emergence of ten categories of critical thinking response: (1) Synthesis; (2) Character Affinity; (3) Character Scrutiny; (4) Evaluative Inquiry; (5) Inference; (6) Image Construction; (7) Author's Writing Technique; (8) Prediction; (9) Ambiguity; and (10) Engagement. These ten categories were further divided into three levels of Advanced, Intermediate, and Basic critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. The categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry demonstrated Advanced Level critical thinking. The categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction revealed Intermediate Level critical thinking responses; and the categories of Ambiguity and Engagement evidenced Basic Level critical thinking responses.

Through analysis of the data collected from the oral response in the literature circle discussions, four hierarchical levels of critical thinking response emanated from the analysis: (1) Analytical; (2) Probe; (3) Conjecture; and (4) Engagement. These four

levels of Advanced, Intermediate, and Basic critical thinking were separated into three levels of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. Analytical and Probe levels demonstrated Advanced Level critical thinking responses; Conjecture Level responses represented Intermediate Level critical thinking responses, and Engagement Level responses denoted Basic Level critical thinking responses.

The careful analysis of written and oral response, interviews, the reflective journal of Mrs. Cook, weekly meetings with Mrs. Cook, and field notes is incorporated in addressing the five research subquestions and the overall study question that framed this study. Each subquestion includes findings from the study and relates them to theoretical foundations and research studies, which framed this study. Following the answers to the subquestions, the answer to the broader, overall question will be addressed.

1. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking of gifted readers through their written response in response journals?

Building on the transactional theory of reader response (Rosenblatt, 1938) the readers came to the research study with their own unique set of experiences and knowledge. Rosenblatt (1995) advocates that reading is a constructive process insofar as both the reader and text are affected by what is brought to the reading. Prior to reading the selected novels, background information was provided to the readers in order to provide them with an understanding of the issues involved in each of the literature

selections. This background knowledge was an essential base from which the readers could begin constructing their own unique meaning.

Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening (2000) state that developing the student's response to literature should be an important goal in the teaching of reading. They advocate that it is through the use of written and oral response that students become actively involved in the reading process. Instead of taking a passive stance when reading, Marshall (2000) believes that until the student's response is shared with others it remains locked inside. One of the methods incorporated in this study provided an opportunity for the readers to share their thoughts and perceptions utilizing written reader response. The response journals provided an avenue through which the readers could verbalize their thinking in regard to the text.

The ten categories of written response that emerged from the data analysis indicated a *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* ranging from Advanced Level Critical Thinking (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry categories) to Intermediate Level Critical Thinking (Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction categories) to Basic Level Critical Thinking (Ambiguity and Engagement categories). Responses in the Advanced Level Critical Thinking revealed an increase in responses at this level over the course of the research study and the Basic Level Critical Thinking revealed a decrease in responses over the course of the research study.

Thirty-six percent of the total written responses from all three stages were coded in the Advanced Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* categories - Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry.

Responses in these categories indicated the participants' ability to respond at an advanced level of critical thinking to the literature they had read. The participants were forming judgments about the characters and their subsequent involvement with the story. The participants were making connections to the text on a personal level by responding with what they believed their reactions would have been in a similar situation, as well as making connections to other literature or media presentations. Evaluating and constructing opinions based on the integration of information; both from the text, prior experience, and background knowledge was another indicator that the participants were implementing advanced level critical thinking skills.

Over the course of the research study, the percentage of responses in the Advanced Level categories revealed an increase from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (29%) to Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (51%), and also an increase from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (29%) to Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (36%). This increase in the Advanced Level hierarchical categories of written critical thinking response from Stage One is reasonable due to the fact that as gifted readers are continually exposed to quality literature at a challenging level, they are able to build and develop their critical thinking (Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006). Continued feedback by the researcher in each of the gifted readers' response journals, as well as discussions within the group, provided encouragement and support to the participants as each continued building and developing individual critical thinking. The participants were continually encouraged to provide reasoning for their responses by providing documentation from the text or incorporating prior knowledge into their response.

The *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* categories at the Intermediate Level - Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction - revealed a fluctuation in responses across the three stages of the research study. Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* elicited a 27% response rate. There was a decrease in Stage Two – The Holocaust at only 10%, and then an increase in response at this Intermediate Level of critical thinking to 29% in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. The increase of response at the Advanced Level and subsequent decrease at the Intermediate Level in Stage Two – The Holocaust may have been the result of the subject matter or literary genres. The historical and narrative nonfiction literature incorporated into this stage of the research study afforded the readers a glimpse into the lives of both Jews and non-Jews as they struggled through this harrowing period in history and provided a rich source of experiences for the readers to ponder and reflect upon.

In the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*, the percentage of responses in the Basic Level categories - Ambiguity and Engagement - steadily decreased throughout the course of the study. Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* had a 44% response rate elicited from these two categories. This percentage decreased to 39% for Stage Two – The Holocaust, and further decreased to 35% for Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Responses in the categories of Ambiguity and Engagement revealed an active involvement with the text and further indicated participants' willingness to share uncertainty with the text or a temporary misunderstanding that they were subsequently able to address as they continued with the reading. However, this decline in responses throughout the research study and subsequent increase of responses

in the Advanced Level of critical thinking presented evidence that the participants were incorporating higher critical thinking into their written responses.

Over the course of this study the number of written journal responses fluctuated between the three stages. Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* elicited the highest number of responses with 170. The number of responses decreased in Stage Two – The Holocaust to 90 and then increased in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* to 117. Several factors may have contributed to the low response rate in Stage Two – The Holocaust. First, the participants were not assigned a specific amount of pages to read before responding in their response journals. Second, this stage of the study began before the holiday break and concluded mid January and several students continued to read their novels during the break. During this time period the participants also missed several days of reading due to a snow day and vocal music practices during the scheduled reading period. This fluctuation in response was reflective of three of the five participants (Gary, Harris, and Lydia) as they generated the most responses at the first stage, the fewest number of responses at the second stage, and then increased their responses for the third stage. Two of the participants (David and Emma) showed steady decline in the number of responses throughout the three stages and one of the participants generated the most responses for the third stage of the study and the fewest responses at the second stage. The higher response rate at the third stage for one participant (Lydia) may be relevant due to the fact that she expressed this was her favorite stage of the study.

The five gifted readers in this study demonstrated a diverse range of written response. Although David produced the fewest number of written responses he was very succinct in his writing and consistently engaged in advanced levels of critical thinking.

Emma provided the highest number of written responses. Her responses revealed her inquisitive nature, but her critical thinking consistently remained at the basic level of critical thinking. Gary's responses revealed he was actively involved in the reading, but over half of his responses remained at the basic level of critical thinking. Harris produced the second lowest number of written responses and consistently revealed the basic level of critical thinking. Lydia's written responses revealed her insightfulness as a reader and her ability to articulate her perceptions. Lydia's responses revealed her ability to respond at all three levels of critical thinking.

In answering the first subquestion regarding how a differentiated reading curriculum influenced the critical thinking of five gifted readers, the written responses of the five gifted readers were coded into ten written response categories. These ten written response categories were further subdivided into three levels of critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* – Advanced, Intermediate, and Basic critical thinking. The data analysis revealed an increase in Advanced Level critical thinking from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, and an increase in Advanced Level critical thinking from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, to Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. Further results revealed a decrease in Basic Level critical thinking throughout all three stages. This research study extended Hancock's (1993) research study, which explored the meaning-making process through the content of literature response journals. In this study Hancock developed nine categories of written response and subsequently grouped these nine categories into three groups – Immersion, Self-involvement, and Detachment. Hancock's

study did not specifically document levels of critical thinking, but instead documented only categories of response.

2. How does a differentiated reading program influence the level of critical thinking expressed by gifted readers in literature circle discussions?

According to the social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), social interaction is an important aspect in a student's learning. Through the use of literature circle discussions the participants dialogued with others, which enabled them to not only express their thoughts and ideas, but also provided the opportunity for them to listen to the thoughts and ideas of the other participants. Forman and Cazden (2004) purported that this collaboration is important because it allows for the mastery of ideas and problems that the participants would have been unable to master on their own.

Oldfather and Dahl (1994) believed that when students were provided the opportunity to interact with others, they were able to construct new learning due to the pooling of ideas and the exchange of information. The participants in this study were provided numerous opportunities for this type of interaction. In Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, there were six literature circle discussions; in Stage Two – *The Holocaust*, there were five discussions; and in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, there were four discussions. Each of these discussions allowed for mutual sharing of thoughts and ideas and in turn provided the participants with valuable learning experiences. The four levels of response that emerged from the coding of the literature circle transcripts were based on the ten categories of written response: (1) Analytical (Synthesis, Character Affinity, and Evaluative Inquiry); (2) Probe (Character Scrutiny

and Image Construction); (3) Conjecture (Inference and Prediction); and (4) Engagement (Ambiguity and Engagement).

Oral responses at the Analytical and Probe levels aligned with the Advanced Level of critical thinking as outlined in the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. The Conjecture Level aligned with Intermediate Level critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. The Engagement Level responses aligned with the Basic Level of critical thinking based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*. Instead of coding individual responses as an analytic method for the participants' response journals, sequences of response centered on a single topic area were level-coded. By using the four levels of oral response, the researcher examined each sequence for the level or levels of response that were present.

The data revealed that the most frequent type of sequence was the Engagement Sequence (22%), the Basic Level of critical thinking. This level of response was based on the categories of Ambiguity and Engagement derived from the hierarchical coding of written response. In these sequence discussions, the participants shared their feelings about the text and clarified situations that were unclear. While this type of sequence did not involve advanced level critical thinking, it was valuable in providing participants the opportunity to make sense of the text. Gambrell (2004) reported that when students socially interact, they have the opportunity to discuss sections of the text they did not fully understand and is beneficial to the students.

The second most frequent type of sequence level was the Probe Sequence (18%). Discussions at this level suggest that the participants moved beyond the surface level of

the text and were incorporating Advanced Level critical thinking. The participants were making judgments about the characters and their subsequent actions in the story and were able to provide information from the text to solidify their opinions.

Sixty percent of the sequences contained Advanced Level critical thinking across the three stages. This percentage was consistent for each stage of the study: Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (60%), Stage Two – The Holocaust (66%), and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (63%). The higher percentage of sequences that contained Analytical Level responses for Stage Two – The Holocaust may be indicative of the fact that four of the five participants stated The Holocaust was their favorite stage in the research study. In addition, the content of the literature incorporated effectively into this stage. The findings of this study are supported by research from Almasi (1995) who stated that students are able to build higher-level thinking when they have the opportunity to interact and challenge each other's ideas.

Over the course of the research study the total number of sequences fluctuated between the three levels. In Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, there were six literature circle discussions with a total of 111 separate sequences coded. In Stage Two – The Holocaust, there was a decrease to five literature circle discussions and a decrease in the number of sequences coded to 50. In Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*, there was a decrease in the number of literature circle discussions to four but an increase in the number of sequences coded to 65. The variation in the number of literature circle discussions was due to the method of differentiation used at each level. In the first level of the study, the participants were assigned two chapters and then a literature circle discussion was held. In the second stage of the study, the participants freely read self-

selected novels without page constraints before the scheduled literature circle discussions were held. In the third stage of the study, the participants read the same science fiction novel, but the 380-page novel was divided into only four reading assignments with literature circle discussions held after each of the reading assignments. The number of assigned pages ranged from a high of 142 pages to a low of 64 pages.

The literature circle discussions revealed five distinct personalities from the gifted readers. David revealed his leadership qualities during the literature circle discussions. He was respectful when he disagreed with other participants, encouraged participation from less verbose participants, and provided many instances of advanced level critical thinking. Emma was reluctant in sharing her thoughts, however her demeanor during the discussions revealed an active interest. Her responses indicated a desire to thoroughly understand the underlying factors involved in the text. (I'm not sure factors is the right word, but at this point I couldn't come up with a different word.) Gary participated in the literature circle discussions but his responses were primarily at the basic level of critical thinking. When Gary was probed to provide reasoning for his responses, there were times when he was able to further articulate his thoughts. Harris was an active participant in the literature circle discussions and was willing to share his thoughts and ideas. His responses revealed that he was capable of responding at all three levels of critical thinking. Lydia was also a discussions leader and provided many connections to real-life situations. She was very perceptive and provided many insightful comments.

The differentiated reading program revealed that 60% of the oral response sequences contained Advanced Level critical thinking. In over half of the sequences, the participants were incorporating higher-level critical thinking through the use of synthesis,

evaluation, analysis of characters and their actions, and personal connection with the text. This research study extends the study of Wollman-Bonilla (1994) in which two sixth-grade literature discussion groups were analyzed. The results from the Wollman-Bonilla study revealed that there was a difference in the type of “talk” used between the higher group and the lower group, but did not specifically analyze levels of critical thinking.

3. In what ways does a differentiated reading program affect gifted readers?

Building on the constructivist theory, Fosnot (1996) purports that knowledge is temporary, developmental, nonobjective, internally constructed, socially and culturally mediated. Further, learning is an internal struggle between what a student already knows and the constructing of new knowledge through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate. Marlowe and Page (1998) and Queen (1999) stated that learners must be active participants in the learning process since critical thinking is involved instead of memorization of facts. In order for students to continue building on their knowledge, meaningful experiences and an environment that encourages risk taking is vital for student’s growth.

Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory (1978) further builds on the constructivist theory by stating that it was imperative that students be presented with educational experiences that are in their zone of proximal development. This zone of proximal development is defined as the area of learning that is in advance of the developmental level of the student. Students who engage in educational experiences that are continually below their zone of proximal development are not adequately challenged and may become bored with the learning experience. Contrast this to students whose educational

experiences are too far above their zone of proximal development and they will quickly become frustrated. The zone of proximal development will vary extensively in a regular classroom setting. In order to meet the needs of all students, learning experiences must be differentiated to meet their needs as evidenced in this study.

Through the use of observational and reflective field notes as well as interviews, participants' comments and perceptions of the differentiated reading program were analyzed. Emma specifically stated that she thought the differentiated reading was *challenging and made her think a lot*. She further articulated that *it had challenged my mind and made me think harder*. She went on to say that the novels were more challenging than what she usually read and that they were not just *stories* but had a lot more substance to them. Tomlinson (1999) stated that appropriate challenge is imperative if students are to develop to their full potential. An appropriate challenge is defined as the level in which students have enough knowledge to get started but need some additional support to reach a new level of understanding.

Emma had the most written responses of all the participants, but was also the quietest participant in the literature circle discussions. Her body language during the discussions indicated that she was actively listening, but was reluctant to share her perceptions and opinions with the group. During the post interview, Emma shared that *I thought it was kind of sad from all the things that people do and it just kind of made me sick about how people, how people just think that they are not suitable for real human life like Jews, blacks, and clones*. This comment indicates that Emma was able to synthesize the information from the literature she had read and generated an opinion about people and their treatment of others. She further stated, *I thought the books were really funny*.

When questioned about the Holocaust books as being labeled funny she replied, *Well, not that one. I think both the Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry and the clone book, The House of the Scorpion were good because like in the House of the Scorpion they make fun of people like a lot.*

The literature in this study motivated Emma to pursue reading several more novels about the Holocaust. Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) purported that the world of ideas is experienced by the gifted reader through the use of quality literature. During one of the literature circle discussions, Emma commented that in the novel *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* the last name of the family that was also hiding with the Franks was different than several other books she had read about Anne Frank and she expressed her confusion as the difference in name change. Even though Emma had commented that the novels that were read were *harder* than she usually read on her own, she was excited when she told me that she had received all of the books written by Nancy Farmer's for her birthday and was eager to share them with me. Nancy Farmer was the author of *The House of the Scorpion*, the novel used in the third stage of the study.

Both David's and Gary's comments about the differentiated reading program indicated that they thought it was *fun*. When further probed about their perception of the differentiated reading, Gary stated, *It's been good because I have learned a lot from the Holocaust and about how they used clones, and about how they treated blacks back then.* He also commented that he had acquired information about the issue of cloning. David commented that the books were *really good* and he appreciated the fact that he could *read a lot*. Both David and Gary were curious as to what novels would be read for the

next stage. Both of these participants stated that writing in the response journals was a challenge for them and David specifically commented that journal writing was *my little trouble spot*. In fact, David had the fewest responses in his response journal of all the participants in the study. It should also be noted that even though Gary had trouble articulating his thoughts in his response journal, he had written comments on 50 post-it notes over the first 270 pages of the novel *The House of the Scorpion*. When asked why there were no post-it notes for the last 100 pages of the novel, he stated, *I wanted to know what happened and did not take the time to write*.

Both David and Gary were interested in Stage Two – The Holocaust. Their interest in this period in history was evidenced by the fact that Gary went to the movie, “Valkyrie” that was released in December 2008 and portrayed one of the attempts that was made on Hitler’s life. David commented that when he had come home from school one day his dad told him that there was a show on television about World War II. He said that he raced downstairs to watch it because this was a big area of interest for him now. The novel from the third stage of the study, *The House of the Scorpion*, also sparked David’s interest as he asked if there was a sequel because he wanted to read it.

Harris stated that the differentiated reading had been *pretty easy*. When probed as to why he thought it was easy, he commented that *the reading assignments were not very long and there was not much homework like writing assignments*. In contrast, he stated that he did not like the writing assignments or responding in the response journals, but admitted that *reading would have been harder if there had been more writing*. Harris generated the second least number of responses during this study with the majority of his written responses at the Basic Level - Ambiguity and Engagement categories - indicating

a lack of critical thinking. He was, however, an active participant in the literature circle discussions. Harris' perception of the differentiated reading curriculum revealed his belief that incorporating *longer* reading assignments and *more* written assignments equated a more challenging reading curriculum.

Lydia's comment about the differentiated reading program indicated that she appreciated the smaller number of participants in the discussions as this encouraged active participation from all participants. Lydia further commented, *but if there had been like 10 people, then it would have been like, well there weren't 10 people that would really be in that group*. This comment indicates her perception that the remaining students in the class were not ready for the challenge provided to the group of gifted readers. She stated that prior to the differentiated reading they had read *really thin books* and that Mrs. Cook had read most of the books aloud to the class. She expressed her appreciation of reading and discussing the literature with the other participants in the group. Lydia's interest was also piqued with Stage Two – The Holocaust as she shared that in addition to the self-selected novel she had read one of the books that was available from Mrs. Cook's classroom library about the Holocaust era.

The differentiated reading program provided Emma with the confidence to continue reading novels that were lengthier and more challenging than what she had previously read in the past. Stage Two – The Holocaust piqued the interest of Gary and David. Gary attended a newly released movie about this period in history during this stage of the study and David was excited to watch a show on television. David further commented that he had become interested in this time period. Both Gary and David expressed enthusiasm for the differentiated reading. David specifically articulated his

appreciation of the opportunity to read at his own pace. Lydia specifically commented on the small number of students in the literature circle discussions and this provided the opportunity for everyone to share. Harris' comments about the differentiated reading program revealed that he did not believe differentiation had provided him any more challenge.

The differentiated reading curriculum had a positive affect on the participants' writing. The participants were incorporating rough drafts prior to the final writing assignments. There was evidence of application of skills they had been taught in their language arts and reading classes. Even though the participants were at different levels in expressing themselves, Mrs. Cook stated that they had all shown improvement in their writing.

The differentiated reading program indicated that the five gifted readers were affected in several ways. First, participants were challenged with documenting their thoughts and perceptions as they responded to the quality literature provided throughout the research study. Second, they were interested in the novels that were read and were motivated to continue reading more literature in specific areas as evidenced by the fact that for Stage Two – The Holocaust, four of the five participants read beyond the minimum book requirement set for this stage. Third, the participants displayed a desire to continue their learning as evidenced by one of the participants attending a movie about the Holocaust period, one participant sharing with the researcher the fact that he had watched a television program about The Holocaust period, two participants reading novels that were not part of the assigned reading for Stage Two but dealt with this time period, and one participant's desire to read more novels by Nancy Farmer, the author of

The House of the Scorpion. Fourth, the participants were also excited about discussing the novels with the other participants in the group during the literature circle discussions and several participants questioned whether or not there would be additional opportunities for discussion. Finally, at the conclusion of the research study, several participants asked if the differentiated reading approach could be continued.

4. How does a fifth grade classroom teacher's beliefs about differentiation change as she increases her knowledge and begins planning, implementing, and reacting to differentiated instruction in the reading program?

Findings from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented research study conducted by Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan (2005) revealed that differentiation of instruction and assessment are complex endeavors which require time and effort to master. When this instructional method is added to a teacher's heavy workload and ever-increasing number of responsibilities, the task of differentiation can become even more daunting. The conundrum that teachers face is supporting the low achieving students to meet the standards while at the same time providing added challenge and enrichment necessary for the gifted reader to meet his/her potential. There is no doubt that teachers experience a wide gamut of perceptions about differentiation and how they can effectively incorporate this into the classroom.

When asked to define differentiation, Mrs. Cook replied that it was *giving all students, no matter what their academic level, materials that they will enjoy and will provide a challenge*. She went on to say that you did not need to have all 20 students in the classroom reading the same book, on the same page, and working on the same skills.

However, she stated that she had tried grouping students with different novels that would provide more challenge and facilitate the needs of all students in her classroom, but stated this was not done consistently because it was difficult to manage. She further articulated that with the students' independent reading she required each student to read at a required reading level based on assessments. Mrs. Cook also stated that she had different expectations for the work the students submit based on their academic levels. She admitted that the differentiation she had so far utilized in the classroom had been very minimal and was not implemented on a consistent basis.

Throughout the research study, Mrs. Cook kept a reflective journal of her thoughts and perceptions of the implementation of differentiation strategies and the weekly meetings also provided an avenue for her to share her thoughts with the researcher. Through analysis of her journals and notes from the weekly meetings, several perceptions emerged. Mrs. Cook experienced both encouragement and frustration throughout the research study. She expressed her feelings of inadequacy in managing a differentiated classroom, but also articulated confidence in her ability to continue implementing differentiation in the future.

Mrs. Cook stated several times she *loved the look of the classroom – different students doing different things*. Some of the students were in discussion groups, some were accessing information on computers, and some were working with the teacher. She went on to comment that this was the vision she ultimately pictured in her mind for her classroom. The students were interacting with each other, they seemed motivated in what they were doing, and they were thinking and questioning. She admitted that even though

she appreciated the fact that the students in her class were doing different activities, the noise level and the movement around the classroom was an adjustment for her.

She was also encouraged by the fact that she observed students becoming more responsible with not only their own work, but also the work of their group. Several students were taking on more leadership qualities and becoming discussion leaders. There were instances during the research study that groups of students wanted to read beyond what Mrs. Cook had initially set for their reading assignment.

The main area of frustration for Mrs. Cook revolved around the management issue. She was specifically frustrated with students who did not keep up with the reading assignments and turned in late assignments. Many comments centered around the fact that she spent so much time keeping track of the late assignments and visiting with those students about the late work that she believed there were times when meeting with the various groups suffered. However, because of those frustrations she persevered and developed strategies that she believed would be beneficial as she continued differentiating.

Mrs. Cook's feelings of inadequacy surfaced in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*. During this stage of the study the gifted readers were reading one novel and Mrs. Cook decided to divide the rest of the class into three groups. Each of these groups was reading a separate novel. Several times during this period, her comments revealed that she was questioning whether or not she could do this on her own, one teacher managing four different groups. She indicated that she did not always feel connected with each of the groups, she felt disorganized, and also unsure of where to proceed with each of the groups.

Despite feelings of inadequacy and frustration, Mrs. Cook also gained confidence in her ability to differentiate. Due to the fact that differentiation had been incorporated using varied strategies throughout the three stages, she had gained confidence at each stage providing the main impetus in delving into three separate groups for the third and final stage. Mrs. Cook believed that team teaching with the researcher was an advantage to implementing differentiation into the classroom and promoted finding solutions to the problems she encountered. She stated that discussing ideas with another person was vital to making differentiation work.

Mrs. Cook was developing a routine for her reading program that she believed would work for her in the classroom. Discovering what worked best for her is the key to continuing the differentiated reading program. She attributed much of the success she felt in differentiating to working closely with the researcher for a period of over three months. Mrs. Cook believed that many teachers who try to differentiate on their own fail because they seem frustrated or feel overwhelmed when they have no one to offer support.

Despite the wide range of emotions and perceptions that Mrs. Cook experienced during the research study, she agreed to continue to differentiate the reading curriculum. Tomlinson (2005a) maintained that if differentiation is to be effective, it must be implemented consistently in the classroom. Mrs. Cook had solidified what she believed was an effective reading curriculum that incorporated differentiation strategies learned from this research study. Her belief that short mini-lessons several times a week in order to teach the reading strategies followed by increased time for students to read and fewer activities were beneficial for all students. In fact, Mrs. Cook requested that the researcher

return to the classroom after state testing was completed and team-teach another unit. She also planned to incorporate the units that were used during the research study into her reading curriculum during the upcoming school year and believed implementation would not be as challenging because she had gained experience and confidence. Mrs. Cook also planned to incorporate the assistance of the special education teacher, the gifted teacher, or a volunteer to come into the classroom several times a week to assist her.

The differentiated reading program provided Mrs. Cook with varied strategies for incorporating differentiation into her reading class. She gained confidence in her ability to provide challenging instruction and materials for the diverse range of intellectual ability within her class of readers. Mrs. Cook observed the benefits of providing longer periods of time spent reading and fewer activities, as the readers were more engaged and motivated to read. She also solidified her belief that short, varied mini-lessons at the beginning of the reading block provided the necessary instruction for reading strategies that were necessary for state-mandated testing.

5. What impact does the fifth grade classroom teacher observe on the students in her classroom as a result of a differentiated reading program?

Tomlinson (2005b) purported that when differentiation is effectively implemented into a classroom it engages students so that they experience satisfaction and pleasure in what they are learning, guides them in developing their capacity as thinkers, and supports students to become increasingly independent as learners. Mrs. Cook observed several benefits from the differentiated reading curriculum. First, she observed students more deeply engaged in their reading as evidenced by two or three students reading in close

proximity to each other and then discussing among themselves what they had read. She reported that one of the low groups of students initiated discussions without waiting for her to assemble the group. They assisted each other with the reading and on one occasion specifically required that their reading assignment include two more chapters, as they believed they could handle the extra reading and were motivated to learn what had happened.

Mrs. Cook commented on two students specifically who struggled academically for various reasons. She observed these two students taking on leadership roles in their group and becoming responsible for their own work as well as the group. Grouping students that were closer to the same ability level provided some of the quieter students the opportunity or confidence to begin contributing more without being intimidated. Her perception was that these students may have believed that the *smarter* students would pass judgment on their ideas even though she did not believe that the smarter students did this.

With the group of gifted readers, Mrs. Cook was impressed with the amount of reading that they were accomplishing, especially in Stage Two – The Holocaust when they were given the opportunity to read without reading limits. Four of the five gifted readers read more than the minimum reading requirement for that stage. She was also impressed with the quality of some of the writing assignments. She was amazed that they were writing rough drafts and then building from that draft. She said that she observed evidence of application of skills in the writing, and although there were different levels of writing within that group all participants were continuing to improve.

The differentiated reading program impacted the fifth grade students in several ways. First, the students were more engaged with their reading. The students initiated discussions and proposed longer reading assignments. Second, Mrs. Cook witnessed many students taking on more active roles in discussions and several students stepping up into leadership roles in the group discussions. Third, students assisted others with their reading. Fourth, several of the participants in the group of gifted readers were expressing themselves and applying skills in their written assignments at a higher level.

Overall Question. How do gifted readers and a fifth grade classroom teacher respond to the implementation of a differentiated reading program?

Borland (2005) believed that high-ability students are the most under-served population of students when differentiation is not implemented in the regular classroom. Mulhern (1978, 2003) stated that even when students are identified as gifted, it is ultimately the classroom teacher who is responsible for meeting the educational needs of all students in the classroom, including the gifted students. Differentiation is essential for providing appropriately challenging instruction for all students. The results of this study provide documentation as to how five gifted readers and the fifth grade classroom teacher responded to the implementation of a differentiated reading program.

The five gifted readers were presented with several differentiation strategies throughout the three stages of this study. The strategies included the inclusion of nonfiction background information, faster pacing, choice of novels, and ability grouping. Through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions, the participants were encouraged to expand their critical thinking.

The results of this study revealed ten levels of critical thinking based on the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking*. The categories of Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry demonstrated an Advanced Level of critical thinking. The categories of Inference, Image Construction, Author's Writing Technique, and Prediction evidenced an Intermediate Level of critical thinking. Basic Level of critical thinking was revealed through the categories of Ambiguity and Engagement. Throughout the course of this study, the Basic Level of critical thinking steadily decreased throughout the three stages – Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (44%), Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (39%), and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (35%). This steady decline in Basic Level critical thinking revealed the participants' ability to move from responses demonstrating limited critical thinking to providing more critical level thinking responses.

In addition to the decline in Basic Level critical thinking, there was an increase in Advanced Level critical thinking. Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* produced the fewest responses in the Advanced Level (29%). There was a sharp increase in Advanced Level critical thinking in Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (51%). Although there was a decrease in Advanced Level critical thinking in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (36%), this still revealed an increase in Advanced Level critical thinking from Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. One of the factors outlined by Collins and Aiex (1995) as vital for meeting the curricular needs of the gifted reader was reading instruction that focused on developing higher cognitive level comprehension skills including critical reading which requires the reader to evaluate the material that is being read. The gifted readers responded to the differentiated reading program by decreasing

Basic Level critical thinking and subsequently increasing Advanced Level critical thinking in their written response.

Four levels of oral response emerged from the literature circle discussions. Based on the *Oral Response Hierarchy of Literature Circle Critical Thinking*, Advanced Level critical thinking was demonstrated through Analytical and Probe responses, Intermediate Level critical thinking was revealed through Conjecture responses, and Basic Level critical thinking was evidenced through Engagement responses. Sixty-three percent of all oral sequences of response contained Advanced Level critical thinking. This percentage was consistent throughout the three stages of the research study: Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (60%), Stage Two – *The Holocaust* (66%), and Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion* (63%). Students learn when they have a chance to interact with others through the use of literature circles (Daniels, 2002). The element of conversation is necessary if we want students to be critical thinkers. The gifted readers responded to the differentiated reading program by incorporating Advanced Level critical thinking in their oral responses in nearly two-thirds of the oral sequences of response.

Tomlinson (2003) stated, “Differentiated instruction is responsive instruction” (p. 2). This *responsive instruction* through the implementation of a differentiated reading program provided further evidence of benefits to the participants. The five gifted readers further responded to the differentiated reading program by displaying increased motivation to read beyond the minimum requirements set for reading as evidenced by four of the five participants in Stage Two – *The Holocaust*. The participants also displayed an increase in interest in learning more about specific topics addressed in the study and further reading of novels written by one of the authors in this study. The five

gifted readers also expressed a desire to continue with the differentiated reading program at the conclusion of the research study.

The classroom teacher responded favorably to differentiation of the reading instruction. First, she solidified her incorporation of short, varied mini-lessons to provide instruction in reading skills and strategies to all students without the use of repetitive drill and practice worksheets. Second, Mrs. Cook gained confidence in implementing various differentiation strategies into the reading curriculum, and the incentive to continue differentiating reading instruction after the research study concluded. Third, Mrs. Cook observed an increase in student engagement and motivation with reading. She also witnessed students rising to the challenge of leadership roles and becoming responsible for their own learning. Fourth, she further challenged herself to look for solutions in areas of frustration in order to improve differentiated instruction to all students.

Mrs. Cook's response to differentiation of reading instruction paralleled several of the recommendations gleaned from a research study conducted by Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan (2005). The results of this study revealed that if differentiation was left up to the classroom teacher, it would not happen. However, in order for differentiation to be successful, the classroom teacher must be intrinsically motivated to change his/her classroom instruction, have consistent coaching and feedback, adequate time with a mentor/coach to gain confidence with differentiation, the opportunity to reflect on the differentiation process, and support from educators and administrators.

Conclusions

In today's classroom, teachers are faced with the daunting task of educating a classroom of students possessing a wide range of knowledge and educational needs. Added to this challenging task is the responsibility of ensuring that all students reach a level of proficiency designated by the state under the No Child Left Behind Act. McTighe and Brown (2005) asserted that providing standards-based education and a differentiated curriculum are necessary and achievable in order to provide an appropriately challenging curriculum for all students. The following conclusions have been drawn based on my interpretation of the findings of this intrinsic qualitative case study which explored how differentiation influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience. In addition, I interpreted and revealed Mrs. Cook's journey as she implemented differentiation into the reading curriculum for all readers in her classroom.

First, **all participants presented evidence of critical thinking in their written responses to literature.** While the percentage of responses in the Advanced Level of the *Written Response Hierarchy of Journal Critical Thinking* (Synthesis, Character Affinity, Character Scrutiny, and Evaluative Inquiry) fluctuated among the participants and across the three stages of the study, each of the participants demonstrated critical thinking in their written response. Four of the five participants recorded the highest percentage of written response at the Advanced Level of critical thinking for either Stage One – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* or Stage Two – *The Holocaust*. This may be indicative of the subject matter of these two stages and the subsequent incorporation of historical and nonfiction narrative literature, which was more conducive to generating advanced level

critical responses than that of the science fiction genre used in Stage Three – *The House of the Scorpion*.

Second, **the literature circle discussion provided an avenue in which the participants were able to discuss the text within the confines of a small group of similar ability students.** All the literature circle discussions, except for the second discussion on December 15, 2008 in Stage Two – The Holocaust, contained sequences of response including responses at the Analytical Level. The absence of Analytical Level responses in this discussion may be explained by the fact that the participants were reading different novels and struggled with a discussion of this type. In the first literature circle discussion for Stage Two – The Holocaust, I took a more active role in the discussion and was able to generate several Analytical Level responses. However, as the participants continued with these types of discussions during the second stage of the study, they were able to self-produce responses at the Analytical Level. All literature circle discussions contained the second level of response, the Probe Level. The highest two levels of sequenced response demonstrate critical thinking through oral expression by the participants. This indicates that the participants were able to discuss the text beyond the surface level and were utilizing critical thinking in all their discussions. Providing opportunities for gifted readers to participate in small homogenous groups is conducive to the development of critical thinking.

Third, **when students were provided with a differentiated reading curriculum there was an active engagement with the literature, increased motivation to read, and an increase in students taking on leadership roles in the classroom.** The quality literature that was part of this study encouraged active engagement with the literature

both in terms of written response in the participants' response journals and engagement during the literature circle discussions. There were several participants who struggled with the written response but took on very active roles in the discussions. One participant in particular was verbose in her written response but very quiet during the discussions. It is through the use of *both oral and written response* that all participants are able to share their response to text in the manner that is most conducive to their learning style.

In providing a differentiated curriculum both the gifted readers and the remaining readers in the class demonstrated an increase in reading motivation. In particular, one group of students specifically requested that a reading assignment be increased as they expressed confidence in their ability to handle the extra reading. They were confident in their ability to read more and motivated by the desire to discover future happenings in their novel. Four of the five participants in the group of gifted readers were motivated to read more than the minimum requirement for Stage Two – The Holocaust. Two of the participants read novels that were not part of the selected reading list for the second stage and one participant was motivated to read subsequent novels by Nancy Farmer, the author of *The House of the Scorpion* from the third stage of the study.

Finally, **educators may acquire the incentive to differentiate the reading curriculum if given the opportunity to team-teach.** The modeling of strategies and working side by side with a mentor who is knowledgeable about differentiation appears conducive to successful differentiation. An educator who is left to implement differentiation in the classroom without support may perceive the task to be overwhelming. However, when teaching in tangent with another educator, concerns and frustrations can be discussed leading to ideas and solutions that will work in the

classroom. In addition, successes can be shared which both motivate and encourage the educator to continue providing the differentiated reading curriculum which is important in ensuring appropriate challenges for all students in the classroom to reach their potential.

Implications for Classroom Practice

While the findings of this study were focused on a group of five gifted readers and extended to the remaining 16 students in a fifth grade reading classroom, implications for classroom practices can be considered for other contexts. Differentiation should be viewed as a necessity in today's classrooms as it provides support to students with academically diverse learning needs (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). Educators must be willing to consider and utilize the following recommendations in order to provide differentiated instruction in the classroom.

- **Time for collaboration.** Administrators must provide time for educators to collaborate with others. When educators make the decision to differentiate, they are changing their beliefs and practices about teaching. To ensure success in this endeavor, educators need the support of the entire educational community. Supporting educators with additional time to share successes/failure and solutions/frustrations is vital in providing encouragement and building confidence when implementing a differentiated curriculum.
- **Provision of adequate resources.** Administrators must provide adequate funding for quality literature and other resources that are necessary for successful implementation of differentiation. When the decision has been made to provide differentiation, a variety of resources will be necessary to ensure that

all students receive challenging materials that will allow them to reach their academic potential. Exposing students to quality literature, which deal with a variety of social and/or controversial themes at appropriate academic levels, encourages and develops higher-level critical thinking.

- **Consistent, prolonged support.** In this study Mrs. Cook articulated her previous attempts at providing differentiated instruction as *basic* and *geared toward the struggling students*. She also expressed frustration with the management issue she had encountered in her previous attempts. In order to ensure that educators have a positive experience when implementing differentiation into their classrooms, ample opportunities for collaboration and team-teaching with a mentor is vital. A minimum of three months working closely with a mentor may provide the confidence an educator needs to continue implementing a differentiated reading curriculum in the classroom.
- **Frustrations as solution builders.** When educators make the decision to incorporate differentiation into their classroom, they must be prepared for the initial frustrations that may accompany this decision. Educators can use these frustrations to thwart their progress with differentiation or view them as solutions builders. Inherent with the incorporation of new teaching strategies are issues of time and classroom management. If an educator is cognizant of these issues prior to implementing differentiation, he/she can prepare for these issues as they surface.
- **Relinquishment of control.** Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) believed that a basic tenet of successful differentiation is rethinking educational beliefs.

Educators must be willing to relinquish their belief that all knowledge must be dispensed through them. All students are capable of acquiring knowledge through independent study or homogeneous group work while the educators facilitate that learning by providing feedback and instruction that empowers the students to achieve academic growth.

- **Curriculum standards as cornerstone for differentiation.** Differentiation and state-assessed standards must be viewed as harmonious entities in effective curriculum. Tomlinson (2000) advocated that unless educators differentiate the curriculum the classroom of diverse students will not succeed. Educators must use the curriculum standards as the base for providing a variety of leveled materials and tasks. Incorporating multiple instructional groups and time variations will ensure appropriate challenge to not only the gifted students, but all students in the regular classroom.
- **Written and oral response to literature for critical thinking development.** Providing students with opportunities to write their thoughts and questions in journals is important in developing critical thinking skills (Ollmann, 1996). Further development of critical thinking can be achieved when students discuss their thoughts and perceptions and then listen to the thoughts and ideas of other students in small group discussions. Incorporating both avenues of response to literature ensures different student learning styles are addressed.
- **Emergence of leadership.** Affording opportunities for students to work with others who possess similar academic abilities may lead to the emergence of leadership and responsibility in students who may have not previously

demonstrated these characteristics prior to differentiated work. Students who have not displayed leadership roles in the classroom may gain confidence when working in a small group setting. Intimidation in a larger group may stifle quieter students from fully participating in a larger setting. Given the opportunity to participate in a small group of similar ability students may actually provide the impetus they need to thrive.

- **Insistence on high expectations.** Regardless of a student's ability, holding students accountable to produce quality work is vital. When students are given appropriately challenging materials that are neither too hard nor too easy, frustration or boredom may not be an issue and students will rise to the high expectations set by the classroom teacher. As students consistently work at appropriate levels, they may gain confidence in their ability to succeed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The intent of this research study was to explore the implementation of a differentiated reading curriculum in a fifth grade classroom and how it influenced the gifted readers' ability to think more critically and delve deeper into the reading experience, as well as document the fifth grade teacher's journey as she implemented differentiation for all readers in the classroom. While the intent of this study was not meant to generalize the findings, the thick, rich description could afford a window into the incorporation of differentiation into a fifth grade reading classroom. Several suggestions for future research are proposed.

- **Differentiation for all fifth grade classrooms in a school setting.** This study was limited to a single fifth grade classroom consisting of 21 students. Even though the teacher and researcher worked closely together for the duration of the research study and my role as a mentor provided valuable insight into differentiation, my experience with management of whole class instruction is very limited. It would be interesting to replicate this study by incorporating all fifth grade classrooms in a school setting into implementing a differentiated reading program. This would allow collaboration among all fifth grade teachers and provide opportunities to flexibly group students with similar academic ability from each classroom.
- **Comparative study of a differentiated versus traditional reading class.** A comparative study of a classroom implementing a differentiated reading curriculum and a traditional reading classroom could be conducted. It may be interesting to compare levels of critical thinking achieved in both contexts. This type of research study could also observe differences in student engagement and motivation, emergence of leadership qualities in students, and academic growth in literacy.
- **Differentiation of reading instruction in a primary classroom.** A similar study conducted in a first or second grade classroom may be beneficial to determine if students' perceptions would be different from the fifth grade students. This type of study would also influence students' critical thinking at an earlier age and may help with the developmental growth of critical thinking over time. The gifted readers' perceptions of a traditional reading classroom

revealed their belief that not enough time was spent actually reading and too many worksheets were incorporated. This perception had been ingrained in them from having spent several years in traditional reading classrooms.

- **Longitudinal study of gifted readers.** A longitudinal study that follows a small group of gifted readers from third through fifth grade in which reading differentiation is implemented consistently in all three classrooms could be conducted. This study could provide documentation of the ongoing development and growth of higher-level critical thinking and vocabulary development. Further perspectives on emergence of leadership skills and motivation of students toward reading may also be revealed.
- **Differentiation and its influence on struggling readers.** A study that documents how a differentiated reading curriculum influences struggling readers and their attainment of comprehension and critical thinking in their reading could provide an additional perspective to the impact of differentiated reading. Implementing consistent differentiation strategies through the use of appropriately challenging quality literature and appropriate pacing could provide insight into improvement of reading skills for the struggling reader.
- **Differentiation in science or social studies classrooms.** This study was limited to providing differentiation in a reading classroom. Future research could incorporate differentiated instruction in a science or social studies class by incorporating appropriately challenging both nonfiction and fiction literature in these content areas and how it influenced the students' critical thinking and acquisition of information in these subjects.

Final Thoughts

With the academic diversity of students in today's classrooms, educators are faced with the daunting task of providing an appropriately challenging curriculum for all students. In addition, No Child Left Behind has prompted states to impose minimum standards that all students must attain on state mandated assessment tests. No Child Left Behind has had detrimental effects on the high-ability or gifted students. Gentry (2006a) stated, "NCLB (2001) is, in effect, creating a climate of controlled learning and sending a message to administrators, teachers, students, and parents that the school's job involves teaching to the standards – nothing more and nothing less" (p. 73). Kaplan (2004) wrote, "The Academic Yearly Progress can be deemed an inhibitor to gifted education if one believes that standardized tests are not appropriate or sufficient measures of student outcomes derived from a differentiated curriculum" (p.124). The goal and focus of No Child Left Behind is proficiency, which leaves students who exceed proficiency educationally deprived (Tomlinson, 2002).

These trends justify why educators are overwhelmed in today's classrooms. Tomlinson (2000) purported that differentiation and standards-based instruction are indeed compatible in today's classrooms. Educators must rely on the standards to align their curriculum and outline the objectives to be taught. With the implementation of differentiation, educators are then able to teach to the diverse range of students in the classroom.

Providing educational opportunities that promote academic growth for all students is the goal of education. It is imperative that gifted students be afforded the same opportunity. Due to limited resources and services, gifted students spend the majority of

their time in regular education classrooms. Educators must implement differentiation strategies in order to provide meaningful tasks that encourage and promote challenging learning experiences for gifted students. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "... the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development" (p. 89). The instructional practice of "teaching to the middle" is not appropriate with the diverse academic range of students in today's classrooms. This method of teaching severely limits the gifted students' ability to reach their potential and promotes a lackadaisical attitude toward education. Gifted students are entitled to experience the feelings of frustration that other students feel when faced with a challenging project, as well as the intrinsic reward that comes from hard work and perseverance.

When differentiation is implemented consistently in the classroom, the gifted students are not the only students who benefit. Providing appropriate instruction and academic materials to grade level and below-grade level students ensures that the work they are asked to complete meets their specific needs. Appropriate educational activities in their respective zones of proximal development are vital to reducing frustration and encouraging continual academic growth.

I believe it is our job as educators to incorporate every possible method necessary to promote educational excellence for *all* students. We should not be content with the goal of proficiency for all students. If all students can meet educational standards, then those standards need to be raised. Differentiated instruction means providing *all* students with the instruction and resources that instill a work ethic of which they can be proud and allows them the opportunity to develop their full academic potential for their personal and professional future.

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Appendix A

Letter of Approval for IRB Application for this Study



University Research
Compliance Office
203 Fairchild Hall
Lower Mezzanine
Manhattan, KS 66506-1103
785-532-3224
Fax: 785-532-3278
<http://urco.ksu.edu>

Proposal Number: 4861

TO: Marjorie Hancock
Elementary Education
246 Bluemont

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair *RS*
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: October 31, 2008

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "The Impact of Differentiation of Fifth Grade Gifted Readers' Critical Thinking and Incentive Toward Deeper Comprehension."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: October 31, 2008

EXPIRATION DATE: October 31, 2009

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix B

Email to Mr. Smith, Superintendent and Mrs. Graves, Principal

And

Return email from Mrs. Graves, Principal

Judy Dreeszen

From:
Sent: Friday, September 19, 2008 8:56 AM
To: Judy Dreeszen
Subject: RE: Research in Mrs. classroom

I do not have any questions regarding the project but am very interested in the results. Is there any way that a portion or all of the results could be shared with the faculty at some point in time? I am sure you and will do a fine job.

From: Judy Dreeszen
Sent: Thursday, September 11, 2008 1:53 PM
To:
Subject: Research in Mrs. classroom

Last spring I visited with you about conducting the research for my dissertation at Grade School. My research project is entitled "The Impact of Differentiation on Gifted Readers' Critical Thinking and Incentive Toward Deeper Comprehension." Mrs. has graciously agreed to allow me to conduct the research in her classroom. She and I have done some preliminary planning and hope to begin the research on October 20, 2008, and conclude around January 30, 2009. My major advisor is Dr. Marjorie Hancock, Elementary Education, Kansas State University. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you.

Judy Dreeszen

9/19/2008

Appendix C

Letters to Mrs. Cook and Students/Parents

Dear Students and Parents:

My name is Judy Dreeszen. I am currently working on my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. In addition to working on a Ph.D., I am also the gifted facilitator assigned to this building.

I am writing to request your consent in a research study that will investigate the impact a differentiated reading program has on fifth grade gifted readers' critical thinking and incentive toward deeper comprehension. It is my intent to be a participant observer during the reading period and assist with providing materials, instruction, and strategies for implementing differentiation into the fifth grade reading program. Your child has been selected as one of six readers to participate in this differentiated reading program. The students will remain in the reading classroom and will receive appropriate differentiated reading instruction by both the classroom teacher and the researcher.

In a differentiated reading program students are given work that is appropriate for their needs. Your child will not be given more work but instead will be given work that will provide adequate challenge based on his/her readiness. Your child will still continue to receive instruction on the various reading strategies as provided by the classroom teacher, but he/she will be reading novels that may be different from other students in the classroom. The students in this study will be encouraged to think more critically about what they read and to look beyond the surface of the novel and delve deeper into comprehending the novel.

I will begin conducting research in late October and will continue through the end of January. During this time your child will be reading novels and responding to literature through the use of response journals and literature circle discussions. Your child's work may be different from the other students in the classroom, but is designed to provide added challenge to their reading curriculum. Your child will be interviewed about his/her thoughts on reading and these interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. These responses will remain confidential.

Classroom sessions may be audio/video recorded and copies of the students' written responses will be maintained by the researcher for analysis. All collected responses will remain confidential. The actual names will not be used in the final research report or any subsequent publications. Participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. Participation or nonparticipation will have no effect on your child's grade.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at home 785-632-5277, or my mobile phone 785-632-1850, or via email at judydreeszen@yahoo.com. You may also contact my major advisor, Dr. Marjorie Hancock at 785-523-5917 (office) or via email at mrhanc@ksu.edu. I appreciate your consideration in consenting to assist me with this research endeavor.

Attached to this letter is the consent form for this study. After carefully reading it, please sign and return one copy of the consent form in the envelope provided and return to the classroom teacher. I am looking forward to this opportunity. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Judy Dreeszen
Doctoral Candidate
785-632-5277 (home)
785-632-1850 (mobile)

Dear Teacher:

My name is Judy Dreeszen and I am currently working on my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University and have previously spoken to you about conducting research in your classroom. I am writing to seek your consent in a research study that will investigate the impact a differentiated reading program has on fifth grade gifted readers' critical thinking and incentive toward deeper comprehension.

I will begin conducting research in late October 2008 and will continue through the end of January 2009. During this time I am asking for informed consent to be a participant/observer within your classroom. During the course of the research I will conduct two semi-formal interviews. The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Classroom sessions may be audio/video recorded and copies of the students' written responses will be maintained by the researcher for analysis. All collected responses will remain confidential. The actual names will not be used in the final research report or any subsequent publication.

Participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at home 785-632-5277, my mobile phone 785-632-1850, or via email at judydreeszen@yahoo.com. You may also contact my major advisor, Dr. Marjorie Hancock at 785-523-5917 (office) or via email at mrhanc@ksu.edu. I appreciate your consideration in consenting to assist me with this research endeavor.

Attached to this letter is the consent form for this study. After carefully reading it, please sign and return one copy of the consent form in the envelope provided and return to me. I am looking forward to this opportunity. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Judy Dreeszen
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Informed Consent

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Differentiation on Fifth Grade Gifted Readers' Critical Thinking and Incentive Toward Deeper Comprehension

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: Oct. 2008 **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** Oct. 2009

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Marjorie Hancock, Professor and Coordinator of Graduate Programs in Curriculum and Instruction, 785-532-5917 (office), mrhanc@ksu.edu

Judy Dreeszen, Doctoral Candidate, 785-632-5277 (home), 785-632-1850 (cell), judydreeszen@yahoo.com

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: **Dr. Marjorie Hancock, 785-532-5917 OR Judy Dreeszen, 785-632-5277 or 785-632-1850**

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT:

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this case study is to explore and examine how implementing differentiation into a fifth grade reading classroom impacts the gifted readers' critical thinking and incentive toward deeper comprehension. Differentiation is a modification in curriculum and instruction that is necessary to support students with academically diverse learning needs. In this study adaptations will be made curriculum for the gifted readers. The gifted readers will be reading novels will be selected based on an appropriately challenging reading level and content for the gifted reader. The gifted readers will also be responding to this literature in response journals. The gifted readers will be encouraged to think and respond at a deeper level than other students. They will also be asked to use critical thinking in their responses. The gifted students will also be placed in a literature circle discussion group based on their higher reading ability.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

- The co-investigator, Judy Dreeszen, will observe and take field notes within a 5th grade reading classroom.
- The co-investigator will conduct interviews of the classroom teacher.
- The co-investigator will conduct interviews of the six gifted readers in the study.
- The co-investigator will collect data through the six gifted readers' response journals.

- The co-investigator will collect data through the video recording of the six gifted readers' literature circle discussions.
- The co-investigator will collect data through additional documents

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

LENGTH OF STUDY: October 20, 2008 – January 30, 2009

RISKS ANTICIPATED: None

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: **Teacher:** The classroom teacher will learn how to differentiate for gifted students in the regular reading classroom.
Gifted Readers: The gifted readers in this study will be exposed to challenging literature and encouraged to use critical thinking and gain a deeper understanding of the literature.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: All names and identifiable locations will be changed or omitted in the final report and in all documents or publications related to this study.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS:

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS:

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
 (if participant is under 18 years of age)

Witness to Signature: (project staff) _____

Appendix E

Webquest for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

WebQuest on Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Guided Learning Sheet: Sharecropping

Name: _____

Go to www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/brown/photos.htm to answer the questions below:

1. Study the photographs. What stands out to you about these images? Describe the quality of life for sharecroppers.
2. Put yourself in one of these photographs. Write a diary or journal entry describing your thoughts about your life and your future.

Go to www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/peopleevents/e_charecrop.html to answer the questions below:

3. Define sharecropping.
4. How is sharecropping similar to slavery?
5. If slavery is illegal, how is sharecropping legal?
6. Describe the traps which tied sharecroppers to the land?

WebQuest on Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Guided Learning Sheet: Jim Crow Laws

Name: _____

Go to www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/jimcrowguide.pdf to answer the questions below:

1. Define Jim Crow laws. Give a few examples.
2. In “Program One: Promises Betrayed”, read the account of Ned Cobb. What does this story tell you about social power in the Jim Crow era? How has it changed from then to now?
3. In “Program One: Promises Betrayed”, read the account of Addie and Jerry Holtzclaw. What does this story tell you about the importance of education to the black people of the Jim Crow era? Why do you think they felt this way?
4. In “Program Two: Fighting Back”, describe how the business worlds of blacks and whites were structured. List what you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the structure.
5. In “Program Three: Don’t Shout Too Soon”, read the account of the “Scottsboro boys.” How would the story likely end today?
6. In “Program Four: Terror and Triumph”, read the account of Maceo Snipes. What does this story tell you about the dangers and the importance of voting to the black community?

WebQuest on Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Guided Learning Sheet: Mob Violence/KKK

Name: _____

Go to www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_org_kkk.html to answer the questions below.

1. What groups do the KKK oppose?
2. During what time period did the KKK have the most political power?

Go to www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_kkk.html to answer the questions below.

3. What things did the KKK do to frighten people and maintain power over non-whites?
4. Imagine the reaction of a man being hunted by the KKK. How would it be different for his wife? For his children? Write a short diary entry or journal entry from the perspective of a white or child of a hunted man.
5. Mob violence occurs when a group of people become focused on a violent plan, and “feed” off one another in their excitement. Soon no one person can stop the violent events from taking place. What examples of mob violence can you think of from recent times? If you can’t think of any, write a fictional event demonstrating mob violence.

WebQuest on Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Guided Learning Sheet: Lynching

Name: _____

Go to www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/lynching/lynching.htm to answer the questions below. Read “About Lynching” by Robert L. Zangrando.

1. Define lynching.
2. Describe the mood of the environment in which a lynching took place.
3. What effect do you imagine a lynching would have on other blacks who lived nearby?
4. What effect does it seem a lynching had on those that actually did it?

Appendix F

Research Guide for Stage Two – The Holocaust

The Holocaust

Read the Welcome to CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center and the Mission Statement at the following: <http://www.candleholocaustmuseum.org>

Next click on “The Education Center” on the left-hand side of the page.

Under the yellow heading entitled The Education Center you will find Student Writings. Click on that link. You will find a list of student names who have written about the Holocaust. The first one I want you to click on is Katie.

In a paragraph I want you to respond to what Katie has to say. Stop and think about what Katie has said and then you write your reactions to her writing.

Choose several other children’s writings to read.

Go to the Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/topics/>

- Click on “The Holocaust” – Read the first four paragraphs. In your own words discuss what the Holocaust was. What time period are we talking?
- Hit the **back** key and click on “anti-Semitism” – What is anti-Semitism? What was the Kristallnacht?
- Hit the **back** key and click on “Final Solution.” What was the final solution? How many Jews lost their lives? What fraction was this of the Jews living in Europe in 1939?
- Hit the **back** key and click on “Ghettos.” What were the ghettos? Why were they established?
- Hit the **back** key and click on “Nazi Camps.” What were the purposes of these camps? What were some of the names of these camps in Germany and Poland?

Read the following websites and be ready to share your thoughts.

<http://www.candleholocaustmuseum.org>

Star of David

Click on “The Education Center”

Click on “Lesson Plans”

Click on “Star of David”

Read the information to the point where it says: Star of David Graphic.

<http://feit.usf.edu/holocaust/People/children.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuhrer>

According to this article, who was the Fuhrer?

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>

<http://history1900s.about.com/library/holocaust/blpictures.htm>

genocide

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10007043>

fuhrer

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuhrer>

children of the holocaust webquest

<http://www.gtps.k12nj.us/schools/gtms/garrityb/webquest>

<http://www.candleholocaustmuseum.org/index.php?sid=49>

Appendix G

Response Journal Entry with Researcher's Comments

2A

243/244 So TJ does want to be with the logans, or this is a scam. On page 243-244 I will explain my point f. What did you think as you read this?

242 What was Cassie referring to with, "Ole man comin' down the line, whip in hand...?" What is your interpretation?

247 Pass You been done for Lee, You killed him! "RW trying to escape her grasp slapped her and her head hit the stove, what a stroke. Why would they do this? Were they trying to get in trouble? I bet they were. Why would they do that, did they think they could get away with it? I bet they did that to get TJ in trouble. I think that was part of it.

How can they be so mean? They're not going to hang TJ. I mean TJ has done some bad things but I don't want him to die. What should his punishment be?

256 If papa knew what was happening I bet he would whip them, or not as much, please don't paper.

Page 261 explains our question about the front cover. Lightning hit the cotton, and this is a secret comment for them. They're not going in yet money for it. Will the house catch on fire? I hope not.

Appendix H

Descriptive Field Notes from November 5, 2008

Wednesday, November 5, 2008 Observation

10:05 – The teacher asked the class to put their snacks away. She told them they were going to work on *Writer's Express*. They were handed a 3 x 5 card, they needed a highlighter, and several students were asked to pass out the book, *Writer's Express*. The skill that Mrs. Cook focused on was prefixes and suffixes. My group of students and Mrs. Cook's group of students were involved in this lesson. The four students who work with the special education teacher had already left the classroom.

Mrs. Cook asked the students what a prefix was. A student replied. The students were told to write prefixes on one side of the card (these were colored 3 x 5 cards). Next, the students had to write the 5 prefixes that were on the board on separate white cards. The five prefixes were co-, de-, en-, bi-, tri-. The students then wrote the definitions on the back. For example, co- is with, together; de- is down, bi – is two, tri- is three and en- is to put into or on and also to make.

Emily walked into the classroom at 10:17. The class was still working on the mini-lesson.

The students were told to stack their cards on their desks. Two students were asked to pick up the books. At 10:25 the students were instructed to finish picking up the materials used for the mini-lesson and then were instructed to get in their groups. I started visiting with my students about literature circles, what rules they follow, what makes good questions, etc.

At 10:30 I started the video camera and the students started discussing.

At 11:00 I stopped the discussion. I instructed the group of 5 students to write in their journals what they had learned from the discussion, what was cleared up, etc.

11:05 – I visited with the students and gave the assignments for the rest of the week.

At the end of the discussion Lydia asked if we were going to do this for just this book. I told her that there would be 3 separate units we would be discussing.

The students said the webquests were very helpful. They now understood what lynching was, the Jim Crow laws, and share cropping.

Appendix I

Reflective Field Notes from November 5, 2008

Reflective Notes – 11-5-2008

I thought the students did a great job. They were focused and stayed on task during the discussion.

I was pleased to hear them using information from the Webquest in their discussions.

As the students were going out to recess, Gary came up to me and asked if we were going to do this again. I told him we would probably be doing discussions about twice a week. I asked if he like it and he said, “Yes, it was fun.”

Next Donald and Harris came up and said it was fun to talk about the book for 30 minutes.

As I listened to the tape this evening, I wanted to job down that David asked specifically for Emma’s opinion. I think he noticed that Emma had not been saying much during the discussion.

The students stayed on topic during the entire discussion and covered a variety of issues. It’s funny, but I had post-it notes in my book for issues to discuss and the students discussed all of them except for one or two.

I am feeling excited about this. I hope this level of discussion continues.

Appendix J

Student Interview Questions

Student Interview

Initial Interview:

Why types of books do you like to read?

What is your favorite book?

What genre of literature is your favorite? What do you like about this particular genre?

Tell me about your reading outside of school.

Who is your favorite author?

Tell me about books you have read that have caused you to rethink your feelings, beliefs, values, and opinions?

How many books do you own?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 representing – I hate to read to 10 representing – I love, love, love to read. How would you rate reading?

Using the same scale how would rate your reading class? Why?

What do you like about your reading class?

What don't you like about your reading class?

When you read a good book who do you share the story with and why?

How do you pick the books that you read?

Where do you get the books that you read (the ones that are not assigned by the classroom teacher)?

When you have read a good book do you like to write about it or would you rather talk about it with someone?

When reading a self-selected book what do you think about as you read?

What strategies do you use when you come to a part in the book you don't fully understand?

Final Interview

How would you describe our reading these past few months?

What did you like about the way we did reading?

What didn't you like about the way we did reading?

If you could change one thing about the way that we did our differentiated reading, what would you change?

Is there anything else that you would like to share about what we have done over the past three months that I didn't ask and you would like to comment on?

Appendix K

Interview Questions for Mrs. Cook

Teacher Interview

Tell me about your teaching experiences.

What made you decide to become a teacher?

What are your biggest joys with teaching reading?

What are your biggest frustrations with teaching reading?

How has NCLB impacted your teaching of reading?

What is your philosophy of teaching reading?

What do you think you do well in your teaching of reading?

Do you feel there are any areas in the teaching of reading that you want to improve?

How would you define differentiation?

Tell me how you think you meet the needs of all students in your classroom?

Tell me about any experiences you have had with differentiation in your classroom?

Why is it important for you to learn about differentiation?

Appendix L

Initial Coding in Red Text

Emma's Response Journal

to

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Response Journal – Emma
Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry

Chapters 1 & 2

I think this is a great book so far and I've only read 42 pages. **Literary evaluation**

This book about a poor family going to school has had me think and I have lots of questions and comments like is T.J. a friend they made or does he like them and he became their friend himself? **Synthesis – she puts the info she learns about the friendship Stacey has w/ TJ and then questions it**

I wonder if a white man or the KKK will enter their house sometime? **Prediction**

Maybe the bus driver was white or didn't like them so he didn't stop for Little Man?
Inference

Why does Moe go to a school 3 ½ hours away because his parents, friends, or lovers?
Clarification question

What about the 2nd and 3rd graders do they get a welcome back? **Empathy for characters – fairness of a situation**

It's sad that he was the only nigra and the only very poor book. **Character empathy**

But it was nice for Cassie to stand up for L.M. **Evaluation of character?**

Mary knows how to stand up to the sub teacher. **I can't make a connection**

Does Mr. Morrison have anything to do with? **Not a complete thought**

Someone also lynched a boy at Crosstown. **Engagement**

Chapters 3 & 4 – double entry journal

As BM left the room, my eyes popped open and I saw her outline, a rifle in hand. / I wonder what was wrong. **Inference that there is a problem**

Appendix M

Second Coding in Blue Text

Harris' Response Journal

to

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Chapters 7 & 8

He gave his coat to T.J. because it didn't fit. / T.J. would be a good salesman. **Analyzes the character** **Analysis of character action**

Papa traded (stole) watermelons. / That was smart of him to trade the watermelons but they were a different kind. **Doesn't understand the irony** **Misunderstanding**

Kids were drinking and couldn't pay for it so the Wallaces just added it to the family bill. / Why wouldn't they just not let them drink? To make the family go broke **clarification** **Evaluation of character action**

Jeremy gave Stacey a wooden flute. / That was very nice of Jeremy. **Character assessment** **Character identification**

There were singing (sic) papers / I think the papers were to sing (sic) people off **Misunderstanding** **Misunderstanding**

When Mama got fired that really made me think. They must be getting back for shopping in Vicksburg. But firing her isn't that a little to far. **Inference of character's action** **Evaluation of character action**

Man if Uncle Hammer were still there he would go crazy. **Inference** **Inference of character action**

At least Papa didn't go crazy. **Character assessment** **Evaluation of character action**

It would probably be very depressing to get fired from your job and have 400 acres waiting to be paid for at home. **Character empathy** **Assimilation – empathy**

How will they get by with only Papa working? **Probing question** **Question – analysis**

Will Mama find another job or not? **Probing question** **Surface Question -**
I hope by the end of the book there will still be 400 acres of Logan land. **Empathy of family situation** **Assimilation – empathy**

Appendix N

Third Coding in Orange Text

David's Response Journal

to

The House of the Scorpion

It must've hurt to land on broken glass. I've never even come close to that kind of pain. The worst I've had is a splinter. But to have 500+ shards of glass everywhere in your body. It's unimaginable! **Character empathy** **Character identification** **Relationship**

I'm surprised Matt didn't want to see Celica or Maria after he'd been cooped up for so long. He said that they were unwanted intruders in his kingdom of bugs and chicken bones – which is gross by the way. I'd want to see family after a few months if I were him. **Character analysis** **Character analysis** **Evaluating characters**

I think it was cruel of Tom to show Matt and Maria the clone. It must've been disgusting. But I have to give him credit he's a good thinker. His plan probably worked though. Maria didn't like Matt anymore and possibly never will. **Character analysis** **Character analysis** **Evaluating character**

Tom did it again. He saw what Matt did with Furball and he got him for it. He gave Furball a dose of laudanum and it killed him. How could he despise Maria enough to kill her dog? She went everywhere with Furball! I think Tom has some mental madness issues! **Character analysis** **Character analysis** **evaluating character**

Ho-Ly-Cow! I did not see that coming. Felicia killed Furball. And she hates Matt! Under that drunk complexion, she's pure evil. I always suspected that **maybe** it wasn't Tom, but never Felicia. I never even knew she knew about it until after everyone started looking for him. She must've intended to kill Furball too because she acted like she really wanted to because she pretty much said she did and I don't think there was any alcohol talk. **Character analysis** **Character analysis** **evaluating character**

Why would he do it? Why? Why, Why, Why?! El Patron seemed to love Matt. Why would he want to just use him for transplants. Maybe they blunt other clones because they're all for transplants and they dumbify them so they don't feel it as much. Maybe El Patron's so wicked, he wanted to see Matt suffer. **Character analysis** **Character analysis** **Evaluating character**

If cloning becomes a big business when I got older, than I'm going to be with El Viejo: God will give me a certain number of years and I will be happy with it. **Inference to own life** **Assimilating info and making judgment** **Assimilating/synthesis**

Joy to the World! El Patron is Dead! That's what was going on in my mind when I found out. **Connects with text** **Connection** **Character affinity**

Appendix O

Final Coding in Green Text

Lydia's Response Journal

to

The Holocaust – *Soldier X* and

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

Response to Soldier X, pages 1 – 67

After reading about a fifth of “Soldier X” I really thought about how badly Jews, homosexuals, and others who weren’t in the favor of Adolf Hitler were treated. Sent off to concentration camps and usually killed in some awful way. **Assimilate info from text & pre-reading** **Assimilation & rethinking** **Assimilating/synthesis** **Synthesis**

I ran into many words that I didn’t understand or know what meant. Here they are of them: painstakingly, enthralled, maimed, hob-nailed jackboots, defunct, relocated, munitions, revulsion, scrutinized, impromptu, abattoir, infantry, and reenlisted. **Very surface –meaning of words** **clarification – words** **Questioning/clarification** **Ambiguity**

I also made notes about things that caught my eye, gagged me, or made me sad. I have a few notes that just say UCK or GROSS though, so I don’t have anything to say for those stickies but here are my thoughts of some of the things that caught my eye. I just thought of how terrible it would be to have thoughts going through your mind that are saying... Hmmm... will I die in these clothes? SO CLOSE! I honestly think that I am being a weirdo to be thinking “Gosh! I’m suffering!” I have “sooo” much homework on some nights. I can NOT say how thankful I am to BE. To BE an American. To BE free. To BE where I am. To BE SAFE. To BE me. In THESE United States! That is something to be so proud of! So proud! The people in that time would have done ANYTHING for the lives we live. They would have given everything. I can not believe how hard it is to realize in SUCH GOOD conditions we live in today. SO LUCKY!! LUCKY!! **Compares/contrasts Anne’s life w/ her own – empathizes w/ the suffering** **Relationship – compare** **Relationship** **Character Affinity**

My other thoughts consisted of: How weird it would be to say “We invaded Poland, and we killed hundreds of people. Doesn’t it seem like the kids in that army have figured out by now that they are the bad guys here! They really don’t see what their troops are doing because their leaders (Fuhrers) have told them that the captures in concentration camps were being WELL TREATED! I don’t really see why they would not tell them that they were treating the captures horribly. **Predicting but synthesizing the information** **Assimilation – judgment** **Assimilating/synthesis** **Synthesis**

Appendix P

Initial Coding in Orange Text

Literature Circle Discussion Transcript of

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Transcription of Literature Circle – November 5, 2008

Donald: What did you guys think about chapter 1 and when they were going to school?

Engagement

Gary: I thought it was pretty amazing that the bus driver tried to run those kids off the road. Engagement

Lydia: I was kind of surprised that their teacher was a white person, I thought she would be a black person because it sounded like they had talked about her being an all black school but it wasn't. Character Scrutiny

Mrs. D: Well why do you think she was white?

Lydia: I don't know, she sounded like she was white when they found the chart she said that was what they were, it said that and it was white, white and the last one was black....and they said something about that was fair and she said well that's what you are and that made it sound like she was white. Character Scrutiny

Donald: I had down in my journal, I thought it was kind of sad that they would have a black person have a very poor book while the white kids have the better books and the black kids have the really really bad books and in really bad condition and they might get blamed for the condition it is sometimes. Probe level response ?

David: That's just how it was back then. ?

Mrs. D.: We need to finish that discussion about whether that teacher was black or white. Dalton you said you had it as a stickie. You should have your book out and pull that stickie and show us where you were referring. Pause. I know, how many other people wondered if she was black or white.
(There was a show of hands)

Gary: Had his hand up and said I think she was white. Engagement

Donald: White - it read that she put the switch on Little Man then she noticed that he wasn't going to cry so she stopped. Character Scrutiny

Gary: how she responded to Little Man and how he acted. Backs up his previous answer – character scrutiny

Mrs. D: Because I'll be honest I made a stickie for that too because I said, I couldn't decide. Because like Olivia said where it was an all black school -- but you think some of the things that she said made you think she was white.

Harris: The Jim Crow Laws won't let them do that I don't think. Synthesis – takes info he learned in webquest and applies it to this situation

Appendix Q

Coding of Sequence Levels in Red, Blue, and Orange Text

Literature Circle Discussion Transcript of

The House of the Scorpion

Excerpt from January 21, 2009 Transcript – *The House of the Scorpion*

Scott: When the book started Matteo, the clone, doesn't know much about like what happened in the world and why he has to stay in the house all the time and so, and either 2 or 3 kids come on and they see him in the window. **Engagement Level**

Mrs. D: So do you think that's going to be a good thing for Matt or a bad thing? **** I asked a probe level question**

Scott: For Matt he was taught that it was a bad thing, but since he doesn't see any people so often he just had to stay at the window and look at them

Lydia: But he wasn't supposed to, he was supposed to hide when they came to the window. But then he jumped out of the window, broke the glass and cut his feet.

David: And everywhere.

Sequence ends at the Engagement Level. Sequence started with an engagement level response I then asked a probe level question and then 2 probe level answers and then final response at Engagement Level

Lydia: Don't you think it's kind of weird that he had a tattoo on his foot that said property of Alacran Estate. I thought that was .. **Engagement Level**

David: No because

Lydia: That marks him

David: You remember the chapter, Celia's story that she said once El Patron said that once something is his and that's pretty much him and he owns people pretty much like he owns a possession or a watch or something, but since it's a clone they are kind of referring to him like an animal or a pet **probe level response**

Mrs. D: So is he an animal? **Probe level question**

Harris: No

Mrs. D: Why do you say no Harris cause everybody in the book says he is? Why do you say no?

Lydia: They're not right.

Harris: Cause he, I don't really know. He doesn't really act like one and he can speak English. **Probe level response**

Appendix R

**Final Coding of Sequence Levels using Red and Blue Text
With Underlines**

Literature Circle Discussion Transcript of

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Excerpt from November 13, 2008 – *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Lydia: What did you guys think about chapters 7 & 8? Do you think that TJ really did tell on their mom? [Engagement Level](#)

Several Participants: Yeah

Gary: Yeah, and he admitted it in the last of the last part of the eighth chapter. He said that he did it.

Donald: That's why I'm eager to read chapter 9.

Gary: Yeah

David: He said, I may have said something, but...
[Sequence ends with all responses at the Engagement Level](#)

Lydia: Do you think he'll get in any trouble and if so, what kind of trouble? [Probe Level change to Conjecture Level](#)

Emma: Well if the Logans tell their mom, he might get in trouble by her.

Harris: I doubt it.

Lydia: I doubt he's going to come back to school, because they know, he knows that they know that he did it and so he may just decide I'm going to be in trouble and nobody would be friends with him. [Moves to probe](#)

Donald: It's practically just part of TJ because he tricked Stacey into giving him his jacket, his nice jacket

David: But he got it back. [Moves back to engagement level](#)

Donald: Yeah

Harris: Stacey got it back?

David: I know.

Donald: But to have him wearing it when it was cold.

Gary: Stacey doesn't want to have to do anything with him.
[Sequence stayed at probe level with a few responses at Analytical Level. Sequence started with a conjecture question and then 2 responses at that level then 2 at the probe level and then ended at Engagement Level](#)

Appendix S

Excerpt of Literature Circle Transcript

Provided for Coding Verification

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Transcript of Nov 10 (Chapters 5 & 6) – Stage 1 – Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Harris: Do you guys think it was interesting that Cassie went to town for the first time?

_____ Level – Starts sequence

Donald: Well, I think it got people thinking that there might be something more bad that's going to happen to them because people saw them and so people might have noticed that she was a Logan and people might be coming to their house after what happened at the general store. They might be coming to their house and like catching it on fire and everything.

Gary: Yeah, the night riders might come after them.

--Sequence ends. _____

Lydia: Do you think she's going to pay, do you think anyone in her family is going to pay for what she did? _____ Level – Starts sequence

Donald: Probably

Lydia: Like when she ran into Miss Lillian Jean. Do you think her dad is going to be mad at someone in their family?

Gary: He might be part of the night riders and tell them and they might come.

Harris: Well the night riders probably couldn't hurt them because or Uncle Hammer is there now and Mr. Morrison so they couldn't get to them too bad.

David: But there is quite a few night riders against a couple men, still it's going to be hard.

Harris: Yeah

--Sequence ends. _____

Lydia: I really thought it was hilarious when the Wallaces' stopped and let them cross the bridge and then they were like tipping their hat and he was like

_____ Level – Starts sequence

David: I think they might actually get in trouble for that one because of what he did. They thought he was Mr. Granger, but still once they realized that he tricked them he might get in trouble for something.

Lydia: Do you think they might think that he stole Mr. Granger's car?

David: That's a good thought

Lydia: It looks just like Harlan Granger's car and they might be like, oh yeah, we'll let Mr. Granger cross and then they're like, wait a second that's his car.

David: Wait a minute, who the heck is that guy?

Gary: At the end of the chapter Mama said, Mama told Uncle Hammer that he might get in trouble.

Lydia: She said, you'll pay for that.

David: You shouldn't have done that.

Gary: We'll pay for that someday.

-- Sequence ends. _____

Appendix T

Excerpt of Mrs. Cook's Reflective Journal

12/1

M

I thought the movie was great way to tie together the theme for all 21 students, even tho there were 3 diff. groups doing diff. activities. The compare/contrast paper can be written by each student, but will probably see many diff. levels of ability.

12/2

T

I'm anxious to start our next step - I like it that we have gradual steps, and that we're trying some different things. It's so much easier to ease into some comfort and routine, then I gain confidence and can really process what I like, what I want to continue, and what I'd like to try. In terms of how to get others to begin differentiating, this has been helpful for me.

12/3

W

Today I'm thinking that it doesn't seem as "doable." I think it might be the change in groups. I have 4 back with my group who struggle, so it makes it feel like there's a "drag." It's harder to feel like everyone is turned in - their not. So, do I leave them behind or keep writing + slowing everyone else down?

12/5

Worse today! I'm hearing the 6 advanced kids, and I'm thinking it would be great to have 6 kids in a group. Monday I think I'll record Julie's comment to them - does she have to be there to keep motivating, guiding, or could they do it on their own?

Appendix U

Final Interview Questions for Mrs. Cook

Interview Questions for February 4, 2009

I want you to talk to me about how you perceived differentiation went over the past several months and incorporate the question we discussed each week - What did you learn this week that impacted your understanding of differentiation?

Have you changed how you think reading should be done in your classroom?

Do you feel the mini-lessons adequately prepare students for the state assessment tests?

Does it take longer to prepare for reading due to differentiating the curriculum?

How did you feel the last stage of the study went when you gave the students three novels to choose from?

How many times were able to discuss with each group during Stage Three?

Did you feel that the groups were able to handle the discussions by themselves?

What time frame do you think is necessary for a mentor to team-teach with a regular education teacher in order for him/her to feel comfortable with differentiated instruction?

What changes did you see in the students in your classroom during this research study?

Did you see any change in the medium and low groups in regards to comprehension levels?