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AN ANALYSIS OF SPECIALIZED READING INSTRUCTION IN HIGH SCHOOL
ENGLISH CLASSES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INCLUDED IN GENERAL
EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Table of Contents

List of figures	..vii
List of Tables	..viii
Abstract	iv
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Background and History	1
Differentiated Instruction	... 3
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	...5
Research Questions	.6
Operational Definitions	6
Chapter II: Review of Literature8
Introduction	..8
Legislation: IDEIA	..9
Legislation: NCLB	11
Inclusion	.13
Co-Teaching	...15
The Achievement Gap	16
Differentiated Instruction	17
Reading Instruction for Students with Disabilities	..24

Differentiation at the High School Level	26
CHAPTER III: Methodology	27
Research Design	28
Site	29
Population and Subjects	31
Research Procedures	32
Data Analysis	35
Limitations	36
Researcher's Perspective	37
CHAPTER IV: Findings	38
Introduction	38
Descriptions of Participants	38
Team 1	40
Team 2	40
Team 3	41
Team 4	41
Team 5	42
Summary of each team's profile	43
The Observation Process	45
Participants' Definitions of Differentiation	46
Information Participants Need to Know for Lesson Planning	48
Teacher Training for Differentiation	51
Planning and Assessment	53

Readiness	53
Student Interests	58
Student Learning Profiles	62
Implementation of Instruction	65
Content	66
Process	70
Product	74
Analysis of Data Across Teams	77
Analysis of the teams' definitions of differentiation	77
A Comparison of teams' definitions and observation rankings	78
A holistic view of the teams	79
Summary of cross team analysis	87
Emerging Themes	87
The importance of the reading specialist	88
The importance of administrative support	89
The vitality of the collaborative model	90
The importance of the team's ownership of all students	92
Summary	93
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	97
Introduction	97
Differentiating the content, process and product	98
Accessing the data	100
Data driven instruction	102

Themes	103
Implications for Educators	106
Implications for central office administrators	106
Implications for Building Administrators	109
Implications for Teachers	110
Limitations	111
Recommendations for Further Research	112
Expansion to other division high schools	112
Examination of building level administrative staff	112
Expansion to other content areas	113
Expansion to a longitudinal study	113
Summary	114
List of References	117
Appendix A Research Subject and Consent Form	123
Appendix B Teacher Information Letter	126
Appendix C Classroom Observation Guide	127
Appendix D Interview Protocol	129
Appendix E Table of Specification for Observation Guide	132
Appendix F Table of Specification for the Interview Protocol	133

List of Figures

Figure 1: A differentiation graphicí .98

Abstract

An Analysis of Specialized Reading Instruction in High School English Classes for Students with Disabilities Included In General Education

By Kathy Rosvold Beasley, M.Ed.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

Major Director: Dr. Whitney H. Sherman
Associate Professor, School of Education

This study is a qualitative case study that examined and analyzed the instructional strategies implemented by high school English teachers when teaching reading to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Ten teachers who teach high school English on collaborative teams made up of a general and a special educator participated in the study. The participants taught at a comprehensive high school that is one of ten high schools in a large school division. Two observations of each team were carried out to examine how teachers differentiate instruction. Team interviews were conducted to gain information about how teachers use data on student readiness, interests, and learning profiles to plan, implement, and assess the learning of their students.

More students with disabilities are receiving their education in inclusive settings so that they have greater access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

Differentiating instruction is being implemented by teachers so that they can meet the unique needs of their students. Results of previous studies have found that students have had more opportunities for success on general education expectations when teachers implemented elements of differentiation. These studies focused on examining single elements of differentiation including student readiness, interests, learning profiles, content, process, or products. This study focused on how teachers plan for, implement, and assess their students by implementing the differentiation framework in inclusive high school English classes.

The results of this study suggest that teaching teams made up of a general and special educator can work collaboratively together to provide instruction to all of their students including those with disabilities. Teachers use data to determine their students' levels of readiness, interest, and learning profiles to design lessons that meet the unique needs of their learners. The participants planned their instruction in their collaborative English classes using student readiness, interest, and learning profile data, but emphasized the beneficial aspects of planning instruction based on students' interest. Teachers said that students were highly motivated to participate in class and complete assignments when activities were based upon student interest.

The study's results also indicate that the role of building level administrators was vital in the collaborative process. The participants discussed how the principal's leadership paved the way for teachers to access data on their students and allowed for teams to have joint planning periods, focused special educators on teaching one content area of instruction, provided opportunities for teams to have input in their longevity, and encouraged teacher participation in personnel decisions regarding changes in team membership.