



November 2011 Spotlight

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ITAG Spotlight

Seventh grade students at Waverly-Shell Rock Middle School are experiencing a form of differentiation while a part of the 'whole class' this fall. Teacher of the gifted, Sarah Cooper, along with geography teachers Mariah Stauffer and Miranda Haugan, feel this is an important way to differently challenge the high-ability students.

Every year the seventh grade students begin the year with Planet Earth, a unit reviewing the 5 Themes of Geography. Students first take a pretest, and those who show mastery of different topics within the unit participate in an enrichment experience with Mrs. Cooper. The topics mastered by students varies from year to year, as do the lessons they participate in with Mrs. Cooper. This year, many students showed mastery of the specific portion of the unit on landforms. Rather than working on reviewing and learning a variety of landforms they already knew, these student took part in a different activity. They were provided with landscape artwork and were expected to defend the landforms in the artwork. These students were doing an activity similar to what was being done in the regular classroom, but their learning was taken to a different level. The goal is to take students to a new level of learning and defending their learning.

As we move on to the next unit, Europe, students will once again have the opportunity to "pretest out" of the regular curriculum. While general education students' learning is focused on basic facts and locations of specific countries in Europe, a handful of high ability students will investigate immigration in Iowa. These students will be asked to analyze immigration trends to Iowa—where immigrants came from, why they came, and why they settled where they settled. The goal is to make local connections in their global studies. Students will create a newspaper with a variety of stories on immigration trends. This newspaper will be shared with all seventh grade students to enhance their learning on the topic.

Mrs. Haugan reflected: "I'm excited to offer more in-depth opportunities to our high ability students." Not all students that participate in the alternate activity are identified Gifted/Talented students. We believe any student who can demonstrate mastery of a given topic should be able to participate in such activities and have their learning enhanced. Our goal is not to provide students with MORE work, but DIFFERENT work and opportunities. This can be done as a partnership of general education and gifted education teachers.

Submitted by: Sarah Cooper; sarah.cooper@wsr.k12.ia.us