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# Teaching Grammar: The most Effective Strategies to use in a Middle School Classroom

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## Abstract

This action research project explores the most effective strategies for grammar instruction to middle school students, specifically at the sixth grade level. The purpose of this research is to help myself and other educators teach grammar in the most effective way. Data consists of student work samples from differentiated lessons and surveys from students and teachers (sixth grade). The method of research is simple—every grammar lesson I taught over a two week period was differentiated and implemented a different strategy. Student work samples were taken from these lessons for analysis. Student improvement and/or declination decided the best teaching strategies. Student/ teacher survey answers were also factors in the decision. Although key findings from this research were not conclusive, there was evidence that supported the project's hypothesis. It was discovered that students are more interested in grammar lessons when taught through differentiated instruction. Evidence shows both teachers and students believe grammar to be a necessary, core subject in schools. However, both groups believe the subject could use a change as to how it is taught.

## Problem

This project was created due to my own personal interest in grammar instruction. When designing grammar lessons, I often struggled finding creative and engaging ideas, which I had ease with for other subjects. When I taught grammar lessons to students, I did not receive the same attentiveness I did in other subjects. Oftentimes students moaned when it was time for grammar, or they complained about the lessons being boring. After discussing this problem with other educators, I soon realized I was not alone. Their confessions of struggle with grammar instruction inspired me to research this problem and to search for answers.

## Purpose

- To evaluate student/ teacher feelings toward grammar instruction.
- To compare student work from traditional grammar instruction with student work from differentiated instruction.
- To find the most effective teaching strategies for grammar instruction.

## Question



What are the most effective strategies for teaching grammar to middle school students to ensure maximum student achievement and interest?

## Hypothesis

The implementation of differentiated grammar instruction will increase student interest and academic success.

## Setting



- **City:**
  - Mid-sized, suburban city in Northwest Indiana
  - Average median household income= \$46,186 ([www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com))
  - Majority race= White
    - Second highest percentage race= Hispanic/ Latino
- **School:**
  - One of two public middle schools in the city
  - Grades 6-8
  - Current enrollment= about 800 students

## Participants Profile

- **Classroom:**
  - Sixth Grade
  - Language Arts block
    - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> period
    - Honors
  - Total students= 27
    - Female= 19, Male= 8
  - Majority race is white.
    - There is one student of Asian descent and one of Indian.
  - Majority of students come from middle to high household incomes.



## Research Procedures

### Surveys:

1. Before handing out to students, a permission form was sent home to parents explaining the surveys' role in research.
2. Once permission forms were returned, students completed a survey consisting of ten statements pertaining to their interest in learning grammar.
3. Students answered by using a number scale—1 being 'strongly disagree', 5 being 'strongly agree'.
4. Sixth grade, language arts teachers were given a similar survey. These statements pertained to their interest in teaching grammar.
5. Both parties did not include their names on the surveys.
6. Survey results were then analyzed.

### Teacher Survey Questions

1	I enjoy teaching grammar.
2	The majority of my grammar lessons use a textbook and workbook as teaching resources.
3	I believe my students enjoy learning grammar.
4	My students learn grammar concepts quickly and easily.
5	I often find it difficult to teach grammar concepts to sixth graders.
6	I often try to differentiate my grammar lessons to fit my students' needs.
7	I think I could change my grammar instruction in order to make lessons more transferrable to real life.
8	I believe grammar should remain a core, academic subject in school.
9	I am interested in learning new teaching strategies for grammar instruction.
10	I often read research dealing with grammar instruction.

### Student Survey Questions

Figure 1

1	I enjoy learning grammar.
2	Learning grammar concepts is easy for me.
3	I get good grades in grammar.
4	Throughout elementary school and sixth grade, I have been taught the same way in grammar.
5	I would like to learn grammar in a new and different way.
6	I often get bored during grammar lessons.
7	I learn grammar best by doing workbook pages.
8	I learn grammar best when it is applied to real life.
9	I learn grammar best by seeing visual examples.
10	I learn grammar best by listening to my teacher explain the material.

## Research Procedures (Cont.)

### Differentiated Instruction:

1. When teaching a grammar unit over conjunctions and interjections, different teaching strategies were used every day.
2. Day 1 and Day 7 were introductory lessons for different concepts, and included teaching from a PowerPoint presentation and watching a *School House Rock* video.
3. Days 2-6 and 8 included various learning activities and formal assessments. Some of these include: solving 'conjunction train' puzzles in groups, creating and practicing with conjunction flashcards, writing and performing interjection skits to the class, tracking the amount of interjections used in students' personal lives, and completing workbook pages.
4. Student work from each assessment was then compared.

## Findings

### Surveys:

After analyzing the results of the surveys taken by both teachers and students, one common denominator holds truth for both: there is a high interest in differentiating grammar instruction at the middle school level. When teachers rated statements pertaining to their interest in differentiated grammar instruction, the results were high—showing a consensus toward 'strongly agree'. However, when asked to rate their inquiry toward the matter, the rankings are more toward 'neither disagree nor agree'. Therefore, it can be concluded that the teachers do see the necessity of differentiated instruction, but have not implemented much change.

When students rated statements pertaining to their interest in grammar, the results are fairly high—showing a ranking just over 3.5. Students had a similar reaction when asked to rank the similarity of grammar instruction throughout their school career thus far. Students showed a lesser interest in learning grammar in a different way (question 5). The analysis of this reaction shows that perhaps because students have learned grammar the same way throughout schooling, they are unaware that grammar can be taught in a different way. Therefore, because they have had little experience with differentiated grammar instruction, they do not see the point in changing the way things are.

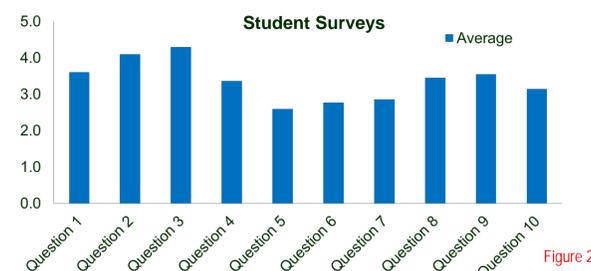


Figure 2

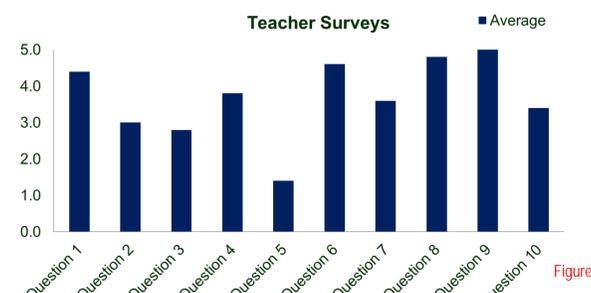


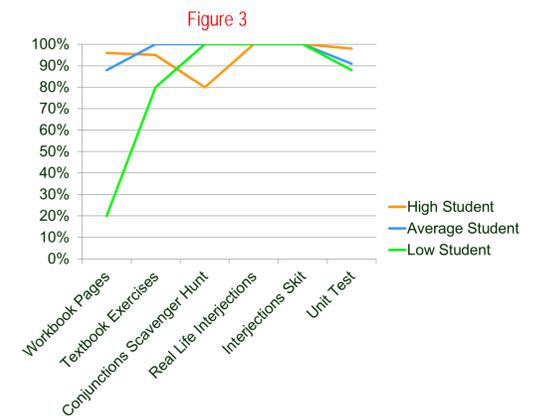
Figure 3

## Findings (Cont.)

### Differentiated Instruction:

Throughout the 'Conjunctions/ Interjections' unit, differentiated teaching strategies were implemented daily. Days 1 and 7 consisted of watching a *School House Rock* video and using a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the material. Although student reactions were not documented, these strategies can still be used as valid data for supporting the end result of this project.

Days 2-6 and 8 consisted of various learning activities to help students practice and work with the grammar concepts. Some traditional teaching techniques, such as using workbook pages, were implemented as well so the results could be compared. As seen below in Figure 3, different students had different reactions to these activities. Because the lessons were differentiated and catered to different students in different ways, not every student reacted the same way. However, the scores of the summative assessment (Unit Test) do show an overall improvement in student performance.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, although the results do not show alarming evidence toward the validity of the proposed hypothesis, there is room for possibilities. When analyzing the survey results, the desire for differentiated grammar instruction becomes clear. There is an acknowledgement from both teachers and students that differentiated instruction does make the subject of grammar more interesting and easier to learn. Both students and teachers are faced with a problem, though. Grammar has been taught the same, traditional way for years. While there is desire for change, there are no real answers or solutions as to how to make that change. This predicament is the sole reason why this research was conducted. One more step toward differentiated grammar instruction has been made. Now, the possibilities for the future are endless.

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