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TE 803
The Bottom Third

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I. Description

I decided to focus on my seventh block general chemistry class for this assignment because it has the widest range of academic achievement. There are a couple of students that have the highest grades and put in the most effort out of the three general chemistry classes. On the other hand, there are a few students that have below a 50%. This class also has the greatest number of students that I consider to be in “the bottom third.” I used many criteria to determine what qualities exemplify a person that falls under the term “bottom third”. These criteria include their general attentiveness in class, the number of missing assignments, their effort in and out of the classroom, and their overall grade.

I noticed that the grades of these “bottom third” students correlate with the number of criteria they exhibit. The lower their attention level in class, the more missing assignments they have, and the lower their perceived effort in and out of class, the lower their grade. The cutoff grade for the “bottom third” students ended up falling under a D+ and C-, or 68% to 72%. There was one student that I included in the “bottom third” even though his grade is usually in the C+ range. I included this student in the “bottom third” because of his behavior in and out of class.

The criterion of general attentiveness in class falls under the larger category of classroom behavior. Classroom behavior includes participation in discussion and

activities, in addition to interaction with peers and me. The students that I consider to be in the “bottom third” tend to be the students that have to be told to keep their heads off their desks. They are also the students that do not ask very many questions during class, and they do not readily offer answers to questions. The other criterion of effort exhibited in and out of the classroom includes using time given in class effectively, turning in all assignments, making up late work from absences in a timely fashion, and coming for help before or after school or during seminar. The students are allowed one late pass per marking period, which can be used within two weeks of the assignment due date. Retakes of quizzes and tests are allowed for the high of an 80%. If students used their late pass or took the time to come in to retake a test or quiz, then they had usually turned in all of their assignments. The students that did not take the time to retake a test/quiz or use their late assignment pass usually had many missing assignments and lower grades in the class.

Even though I have identified some common themes among the traits of students that I consider to be in the “bottom third”, each case was unique. There are some students that are not attentive or participatory in class, but they do well enough on tests and quizzes to have a C in the class. Another group of students puts forth a great deal of effort and pays attention in class, but does not do well on quizzes and tests. Many students in seventh block would get distracted by their disrespectful peers that would talk during class. About half of the students in the “bottom third” are not attentive in class; they do not put forth much effort out of class because they have many missing assignments, and if they do take the test, they do very poorly on it. There are a couple of students in seventh block that have about a 25% in the class or less because they have not taken a test

or quiz this semester. When the students are in class, they are not attentive, and one of them is often a distraction to at least one other student.

One of the students that have grades below 25% is a girl who has been absent quite a few times this semester. She is capable of doing very well in the class, but she recently started dating a boy that is having trouble at home. She is focusing on helping him rather than keeping up with her own schoolwork. When she is in class, she often socializes with a couple of her friends instead of working on the assignment. I caught her copying some homework problems from a friend one time in class, so I gave her a zero for the assignment. She has come in to seminar once this semester, and that was only after asking her for weeks in a row to do so. She has told me that she would come in after school for help a few times, but never showed up.

Two students that I consider to be in the “bottom third” have come in to seminar the majority of the time this semester, but it is obvious that seminar is the only time outside of class when the students work on chemistry. It is good that they come in to seminar rather than doing nothing at all, but it is frustrating that we are pretty much re-teaching them the concepts. The two students are attentive during seminar, which is sixth block, right before their chemistry class seventh block. Both of the students are very inattentive during seventh block. One of them actually told me that he “was good during seminar, so he shouldn’t have to be good during seventh block too.” This student gets most of his homework done in seminar, but he does very poorly on tests and quizzes. The other student that comes into seminar often does not turn in all of his assignments, but he does pretty well on tests and quizzes. He is the student mentioned earlier that has above a 72%, but I still consider to be in the “bottom third” based on his classroom behavior.

Both students tend to get distracted either by each other or other students in seminar, so they often require constant supervision by either my mentor or me. When we travel around the room to answer other students' questions, they have not accomplished very much, or anything at all, when we come back to them.

II. Previous Efforts

As I discussed earlier, two students in the "bottom third" do not pay attention in class, but they come into seminar quite often. They do not come prepared for class or seminar, and they are often tardy to class. During class, they frequently put their heads on their desks. My mentor and I have had many discussions with them about how we are very happy that they are taking the initiative to come into seminar for help, but that we are disappointed with their effort in the class. We talked with them about how it would be a much better use of all of our time if they would focus their attention during class, so that the time in seminar could be more of a review than a re-teaching of the material. These discussions have not produced any change in the students' behaviors. I have called home a few times, but have been unable to reach their parents. One of the student's parents came to parent/teacher conferences, so we were able to discuss this issue of paying attention in class and completing all assignments.

We continue to encourage them to come into seminar for help, and they continue to show up at least once a week. At least the students are coming into seminar rather than using that time to socialize with their friends. Overall, I would consider the interventions to be successful because both students passed the class first semester, and they are passing, just barely, this semester. If the students did not come into seminar, I do not

think they would have passed last semester, and they would definitely be failing this semester. There is plenty of room for improvement because both students are capable of getting at least a C, and one of them could be a B+ student, if they put more effort into studying and getting all their assignments completed.

A couple of the other students previously mentioned have not had as successful interventions as the boys that come in during seminar. There is a boy in seventh block and the girl that has the boyfriend that is holding her back who have come in only once to seminar, even though we have asked them to come in almost every day that they have come to class. I have tried calling both of their houses to talk to their parents, but I have only been able to leave messages. Their parents did not attend parent/teacher conferences, so we have not been able to get the parents involved in helping them.

We have talked to the girl about coming in before or after school to try to catch up, and that we were willing to give her full credit for all of her make-up work, but she has not come in before or after school and she has only made up one assignment in the one seminar she came to. She told us that she could not come in during seminar because she has to help her boyfriend. The day that I caught her cheating on a homework assignment, I told her to stay after class to talk to me. When the bell rang, she practically sprinted out of the room. She has told me a couple of times that she would come in after school, but failed to show up. This semester, she has a 25%, but last semester she had a 70%. This drastic change in grade is reflective of her effort in and out of class, her attentiveness in class, and her number of missing assignments. She does not seem concerned about failing the class, because she chooses to help her boyfriend pass his classes before she takes the time to try to catch up so that she can pass her classes. I do not think that any of my

attempts to help her have worked out very well because she is still failing the class, and it is getting late in the semester to be able to catch up to where the rest of the class is right now.

III. Plan for Future

I should try more often, and at different times of the day, to contact the parents of the students that fall into the “bottom third”. I did not try emailing the parents previously discussed, but this could be a very good option for contacting parents that work during the day. If the parents are more involved in what the student is doing in school, maybe the parents will encourage the student to complete their homework and turn in assignments. This would be particularly helpful with the group of students that exhibit the trait of having many missing assignments. Even if the assignments are not completely done, it would be better for the students to turn in something rather than nothing.

Northview is actually trying to correct the problem of how harmful zeros can be on a students’ grade by eliminating homework completely. The principal at Northview, Mark Thomas, said that in addition to the elimination of homework, they are in the process of approving the addition of an evaluation of employability skills as a part of a student’s grade. Employability skills include being on time for class, being prepared for class, the student’s behavior in class, and how the student treats peers and the teacher. This is one strategy that would benefit the group of students in the “bottom third” that put effort into their work and behave in class, but do not perform well on tests and quizzes.

Another strategy that could be used to work on teaching the “bottom third” better is trying harder to figure out what the student’s interests are, and finding some way to

apply it to chemistry. The group of students in the “bottom third” that have poor attendance records are difficult to connect with because when I do have a conversation with them, it is normally about trying to get them into seminar to make up work that they have missed. Attendance is especially important in schools that have block scheduling because more material is covered in the longer class period. New and important information is presented pretty much every day, so when a student misses a day, they need to put the effort getting help understanding the material they missed when they were absent. The students are given absence reports when they have missed a class, so the absent student knows what was done in class, and, therefore, what labs or activities need to be completed as make-up work. Seventh block is my largest class with 30 students. The more students in the class, the harder it is to get to know the interests of all the students. I need to make more of an effort to get to know the students that are not always in the room because they are the students that need the most help.

Most of the students that I consider to be in the “bottom third” of the class show very little motivation towards school. In *Secondary Classroom Management*, Weinstein proposed that motivation depends upon two factors, the value of the assignment to the student and the student’s perceived expectancy to succeed. If either the value of the task or the expectancy for success is missing, the student will not be motivated to complete the task. One or both of these components seems to be missing for most, if not all, of the students in the “bottom third.” I need to work on showing these students the value of school, and I need to give them the chance to succeed in my class.

I could attempt to show the value of school by appealing to what most human beings care about to some extent, money. I could find statistics that show how much

more money a high school graduate makes compared to a high-school dropout, and how much more money a college graduate makes than a high-school graduate. This could show them one way school is valuable beyond the importance of stimulating the mind and learning about the wonders of the world.

I could build the student's expectancy for success by providing opportunities that allow the student to complete a lab or activity that appeals to his/her interests. Students would need scaffolding in which they are presented with activities that are not very challenging, and then progressively increase the expectations for the assignment. When the student sees the value of the assignment and has the expectation for success, then they will be more motivated to complete that assignment.

IV. Resources

Some of the resources that might help me teach the "bottom third" better could be parents, other teachers, administrators, and counselors, and the students that fit the category of the "bottom third." The parents of the students in the "bottom third" could help motivate their children to work outside of the classroom to complete homework assignments. They could also help give insight into their children's interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

It is very important to get to know the students in order to determine the best methods to present material in order to maximize their potential to achieve. If the parents of these students cannot help give perspective about the student, another resource could be other teachers. Teachers can help each other by sharing information about students' interests and what has worked well, or not worked well, when teaching a particular

student in the past. This can be dangerous if the teacher giving advice is being judgmental or prejudice against that student. Administrators and counselors are often more knowledgeable about the student's home life, and this knowledge may assist in forming connections with the student.

The last, and most important, resource is the student. Just by talking to the student and listening to what they have to say, a connection can be made with that student. The stronger the connection, the more likely the student will do something they do not want to do just because you asked them to do it. The more a teacher knows about a student, the more tailored the instruction can be in order to bring out the student's strengths and develop the student's weaknesses. The student is the most direct source for information, so it is important to utilize that resource. Hopefully the effective use of these resources will allow for better teaching of the "bottom third."