**Case Study**

In the case of **Andrew Smith,** a student of mine**:**

**Proposal:**

**The behavior that concerns me:**

Andrew is a very apathetic student. While smart, he only chooses to participate after numerous prompts from myself. I have already caught him plagiarizing in my class once, but since I talked to him about it and explained that I expected more out of him, he has somewhat improved. The only issue being that I have to walk him through all the assignments.

**Here are some hypotheses I have for why the student is behaving this way:**

I believe that Andrew thinks of himself as dumb. He has never done well in his classes, and even my mentor thinks of him as a dumb kid. When I work with him and show confidence in his academic abilities, he shows a great amount of intelligence and promise. I think his apathy is an issue of self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Here is some literature that helps me think about why this student may be behaving this way:**

My biggest aid to reach Andrew is the text, *Overcoming Student Apathy: Motivating Students for Academic Success* by Jeff C. Marshall.

**This is an inventory of what I have already tried:**

**1. Have I made numerous and varied efforts to connect empathically with the student?**

Yes. I have tried numerous times and been fairly successful. The issue is it doesn’t last.

**2. Have I provided numerous and varied opportunities for the student to learn? What specific strategies have I tried?**

Not tailored to Andrew, no. I teach him along with the rest of his class, and then help him after school if necessary.

**3. What have I said directly or indicated indirectly to the student that might help to change attitudes, behavior?**

I have addressed his behavior numerous times, and showed confidence in his academics. He has yet to take responsibility for his own education, and wants after school time to be catered to him.

**4. Have I contacted others who might help me with the student (e.g. parents, guidance counselor, special ed teacher, other teachers)?**

No, I have not yet. Guidance counselors are unhelpful at the school, and he is not special ed. Other teachers have lost faith in him.

**5. In this case, have I accounted for teaching the student to take responsibility for his/her own actions and learning? How have I done that?**

No. Since I wish him to do well, I have allowed him to lean heavily on the support that I have to give him, which ends up making it easy for him to continue to do so.

**6. Do I detect in myself any bias toward this student that might interfere with my best efforts? How might I counteract this?**

No. I do have a soft spot for students who come in for help and make the effort. The issue with Andrew is that he waits until the last minute and makes it difficult for him and myself to get the work done.

**7. How have my efforts devoted to this student affected the time and attention devoted to other students? To my personal time?**

Definitely to my personal time – not to my class time. He comes in after school whenever assignments are due and requires help. He eventually does the work, he just needs to have his hand held through the entire process.

**Action Plan:**

**In light of the questions I answered in my proposal, here is what I might try:**

For my case study student, Andrew, I have decided that I should meet outside of class (after school or during my prep hour) to track how he is doing on the next major assignment. I don’t want to have to walk him through the entire next assignment, but I think it would be beneficial to make sure he is on track pro-actively instead of retro-actively. I also plan on giving more verbal praise to him in class when he does anything good in class. Though I don’t think he necessarily doesn’t do his work for attention, I think reassuring him in front of his peers that he is in fact intelligent will help us both. As I said in my case study proposal, I believe that his apathy and lack of motivation come from being categorized as lazy and dumb by both his peers and teachers in the past. I am hoping to change that for him.

**Here is some literature that supports my action plan:**

In “Overcoming Student Apathy: Motivating Students for Academic Success” by Jeff C. Marshall, Marshall writes, “Without some intervention, the Downtrodden (student) has little hope for succeeding on major projects such as large term papers in English or creative investigations in science because the components that comprise these projects often remain hidden and elusive” (110). This is research that supports the notion that I should in fact intervene in Andrew’s education. By not doing so, I am like every other teacher he has had that has given up on him. Marshall goes on to say, “I learned many years ago that ability is meaningless if motivation and desire are lacking” (111). So as I noticed, Andrew is a smart kid, but he will continue to perform poorly until I find a way to internally motivate him. By working with him outside of class, I will hopefully be able to reach him on a deeper level than I have previously, since his lack of motivation seems to continue. There was slight improvement last major project we did, but that was only temporary. I need to find a way to change his attitude about school long-term, not just in the moment.

In Jessica J. Summer’s article, “Cognitive Approaches to Motivation in Education,” she discusses students’ tendencies to perform academically similar to the way that they have performed and been perceived in the past. She writes, “Students’ attributions are perceived, and they are sometimes incorrect or inappropriate ways of looking at causes for failure and success. Finally, one’s own personal history of success or failure has a very strong influence over attributional decisions on current and future tasks” (115). This explains Andrew’s actions in the classroom, because he has been told he is dumb by peers and teachers alike, and it obvious that he believes that himself. He is constantly trying to prove to his peers that he is smart, and he really is, but he also attributes failure to the fact that he is dumb. Summer’s article assures me that it is not too late to reach Andrew though, for she later states, “The good news is that attributions can be changed to be more adaptive if the student receives feedback on how they can make those changes” (115). Therefore, by giving Andrew positive feedback when he does good things in class, no matter how minor, I will be building his own confidence in himself.

**Reflection (after GLT):**

**As of** March 1, 2013**, here is an update as to** Andrew’s behavior:

Andrew has improved significantly in my class. He has turned in all but one assignment in on time, and that assignment was one that he was to have completed over mid-winter break. He is paying attention in class (mostly, certainly more than before), and definitely talking less.

**Here are the improvements I’ve seen:**

Andrew has been turning his work in on time (for the majority), has been paying attention more in class and talking less, and is more invested in receiving good grades in the class. He has also referred to himself as “smart” as opposed to “dumb,” which is definitely an improvement in attitude.

**Here is what still concerns me:**

I am still concerned that after I back down on my efforts and stop externally motivating him, he will backtrack on the progress he has made. I am also unsure if he will continue this transformation in other classes, particularly if the teacher doesn’t work with him as I have. I am afraid that I have only externally motivated him with grades, as opposed to internally motivating him to do well for himself and his future.

**Here is an Inventory of what I have tried:**

**1. Have I made numerous and varied efforts to connect empathically with the student?**

Yes. This has almost proved to put me at a disadvantage with Andrew. I have been too empathetic in the past, which allowed his poor work ethic and lack of motivation to carry on for longer than it should have. Andrew requires a tough love approach, in which I set individual and specific standards for him, and let him know what I expect out of him, and he then tries to reach those goals; almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**2. Have I provided numerous and varied opportunities for the student to learn? What specific strategies have I tried?**

I have moved Andrew’s seat, so he is up-front and center, and has every possible opportunity to succeed, as far as his location is concerned. I have attempted to even the playing field for him; as in, I have attempted to hold him to the same standards (or sometimes higher than) the other students in the class. It’s easy to write him off, as he does himself, but that has proved detrimental to his education thus far in his student career. Most importantly to the case study, I have maintained a working relationship with Andrew in which I verbally motivated him and reinforced his own intellectual ability. By continually telling him that I expect more out of him and giving verbal reminders of the need for his success, he has performed better academically and in a more timely manner than previously.

**3. What have I said directly or indicated indirectly to the student that might help to change attitudes, behavior?**

I have motivated Andrew by reinforcing personal standards and expectations for him and him only. I have literally told him that I expect more out of him than the other students because I know he is smart and does not work up to his potential. I have continually told him that I know he is smart and that he is wasting his potential by not doing the work and not paying attention in class. This has proved to work to my advantage, because it’s true and he knows it. Andrew is not necessarily a genius, but I wouldn’t even know if he was because up until this point, he hasn’t proven himself academically, or reached the potential which I know he could have. He has since improved, but I don’t know if I’ve seen the peak of what he can do.

**4. Have I contacted others who might help me with the student (e.g. parents, guidance counselor, special ed teacher, other teachers)?**

I did not need to contact any other people as resources. It seems as though Andrew’s behavior is acceptable to his parents, as demonstrated by the fact that they don’t come to conferences, and his grades from his previous two years in high school are low. The guidance counselors at our school are pretty unconnected to the student population sans college preparation. Though a good case could probably be made for it, Andrew has not been diagnosed as any type of special needs and has not been assigned an IEP. Other teachers have seem to have already written him off, which is why I chose him as an appropriate case study, to hopefully change the way he thinks about his education and educators.

**5. In this case, have I accounted for teaching the student to take responsibility for his/her own actions and learning? How have I done that?**

Yes and no. Making Andrew take responsibility for his own success and believe in himself has been the main goal of my case study. To an extent, I think I have succeeded. This has been achieved be previously stated methods, such as verbal motivation and positive reinforcement. On that same note, there is the chance that when I stop the (external) motivation, or when I leave this placement, he will fall into his old ways once again. He has not yet proven to me that he will continue to pay attention and turn in all assignments (on time) without my coaxing, but that was the goal of choosing him as my case study.

**6. Do I detect in myself any bias toward this student that might interfere with my best efforts? How might I counteract this?**

Though Andrew is a problem student, I have found myself to be empathetic towards him. I want him to understand the material that I teach in my class more than anything, and I get so excited for him when something clicks, which has generally made me a little more lenient on him than I should be. I have tried to be as unbiased as possible in this case study as to uphold the scientific authenticity. To this effect, I have been a little more pro-active as opposed to post-active in reminding him about work and due dates and projects. I hope to eventually get to the place where I don’t have to constantly remind him and he finds the internal motivation to do it on his own.

**7. How have my efforts devoted to this student affected the time and attention devoted to other students? To my personal time?**

My efforts in transforming Andrew’s attitude towards his education has not detracted from my attention to other students or class time, but it has definitely taken from my personal time. I have stayed after school with Andrew to make sure he is on track with the assignments that needed to be turned in too many times to count, as well as making sure he understands what I’m asking him to do and the material covered during class. I want to help Andrew succeed and make sure he has the opportunity to do so, but at what point does the responsibility become his? As a teacher, is it my responsibility to re-teach a lesson after school numerous days in a week for individuals that can’t seem to grasp what I’m saying during the actual class period, especially if it’s one specific student?

**Final Reflection:**

**Here is why I think the student responded the way that he or she did to my interventions (be specific):**

I think Andrew has been told he is dumb throughout his entire life. He is a jock, and no one has seemed to have expectations of him succeeding in school, including himself. It’s quite unfortunate, because he is not a stupid kid (is anyone?), but he thinks of himself poorly. As I stated earlier, I feel it is a case of self-fulfilling prophecy. By making Andrew believe that he could in fact do better, and making him invest in that idea, he did in fact do better.

**Here is some literature that justifies my claims:**

Jessica J. Summer’s article, “Cognitive Approaches to Motivation in Education.” Summer argues that positive reinforcement is extremely important in making changes to attitude, particularly to motivation problems stemming from past issues with not living up to others expectations.

“Overcoming Student Apathy: Motivating Students for Academic Success” by Jeff C. Marshall breaks down students into social categories, in order to better understand why they are not motivated within the classroom. Andrew falls into the category of the “Downtrodden” as well as the “Player”.

**What have I learned that will help me with cases like this in the future? What mistakes (if any) did I make? What seemed to work?**

I have learned that students are sensitive to the expectations that adults have for them, and in turn, the ones they create for themselves. For the future, I have realized the importance of positive reinforcement and the power of telling a student something as simple that they are smart. If I were to conduct a case study again similar to that of Andrew’s, I would perhaps give Andrew a little more accountability for his success. While I have reassured that Andrew that his brain and work was what was earning the grades, as opposed to my help, but I should have perhaps “held his hand” a little less during the entire process. Overall, just having faith and believing in Andrew seemed to be enough for him to invest in his education and himself, something that I hadn’t seen in him or his behavior previous to this case study. Positive reinforcement has been positively reinforced through this case study, and I will be sure to take this strategy with me, wherever I end up teaching.