

The learner and the environment:

Quantel is a high school junior. The class is English III (American Literature).

At Grandview High School classes are on a rotating A/B schedule; students have each class every other day for ninety minutes. Within those ninety minutes, there are several lessons. I break up the block into multiple 10, 15, 20 minute activities. We have a journal, we have silent reading, we have vocabulary, we have grammar, we have literature, and we have writing. Almost all of those are completed daily.

Room 214 is an average size classroom with thirty desks, a teacher's desk, a teacher's computer desk, a book shelf, and a podium. The seats are usually in rows. The walls are blue and contain many posters about behavior, expectations, and posters to promote reading.

Observations:

The motivation problem as I can see it is that Quantel does not want to follow school rules and only wants to get by with the minimum amount of effort. He would be happy with just passing, whereas I know he is capable of more.

Quantel will come in without an ID on and around his neck. I ask him where it is, it's in his pocket. I ask him to please put it on his neck. He does but it will not stay there.

I then notice he does not have his textbook or binder. I ask where his books are. They are in his locker. The bell rings. He is on time, but unprepared.

The first order of business in the block is the journal. They have to write for ten minutes about the assigned topic. Quantel does this without prompting; this is the same routine as last year. We struggled last year. I walk around and initial the journals as the students finish writing. Quantel's isn't very long, and he writes big. Journals are

collected after the fifth one. Because he doesn't bring his binder or his spiral, Quantel's are always late and have to be rewritten.

After the journal the students have 10 minutes to work on their vocabulary packets. I call on students to read the sample sentences and the class agrees on the correct definition. They work on the sentences and paragraphs on their own. Quantel does not work with the rest of the class. He is almost finished when the rest of us are finished with the definitions. When he is finished he turns in the packet and puts his head down. I have spent time asking him to sit up, but he never really does. He tells me he has a headache.

When the timer goes off we move onto Literature (or Writing). I try to do short pieces together in class; longer pieces are read outside class and are discussed in following class. The short pieces are followed by discussion and working in pairs on analyzing the elements of literature.

The problem here is that Quantel does not have his book and will not share. When he is in a good mood he will answer questions out loud but on other days he will only sit with his head down not participating. Perhaps he is bored? But on homework and quizzes I cannot see that he completely understands the concepts; either because he didn't turn it in or the work is incomplete.

He is not exactly disruptive, but he's a big guy (6'7") and others can see that he is not participating and will take his cues.

TARGET:

Task:

The tasks for a block are set up so that students will not get bored or burned out. They are also set up so that some (not a lot) homework is required. Students who work at

a faster pace usually finish and turn in their work, while others have some to take home. I have decreased the class time given on tasks to maximize the amount of “on task” time the students spend. Students are told why we do seven sections of vocabulary and why we read old American pieces. I even have them make the connections to real life so they see that humans are still struggling with the same questions/themes.

On the white board I write up our objectives for the day, what is due today, the agenda, and the homework for the next class. The idea is that student can see what we are supposed to learn and how we are going to get there. When visitors come into the room students are able to tell them what we are doing and why.

Authority:

We are a literature class students are required to talk about the topic and weigh in on it. This year is the first time I have introduced the Seminar Discussion model. I have them discuss the literature in a large group. With their reading they either had to answer questions, write their own questions, or respond to quotes from the text. They bring these items to the discussion. All students are required to participate at least once in the discussion. Participation means that they are required to add to the discussion by asking questions or elaborating on comments already out for discussion. Simply agreeing with what is being said is not sufficient. The teacher’s only role is to track who is speaking and who isn’t. I only interrupt if there is something that needs addressing or they are way off in their thinking. I take volunteers to be the leader. The leader’s role is to make sure everyone has had a chance to weigh in before they move on to another question. They are also to make sure everyone in the group participates or has the opportunity to speak.

Once I introduced the leader to the discussion each class gained much improvement in participation and students who wouldn't normally participate volunteer to be the leader.

With the discussions I am also teaching them how to talk to other students and use the class as a resource for getting information (instead of using the teacher exclusively).

Recognition:

Students are mostly recognized privately through stickers and grades. If students are struggling I call them up and chat with them about what is going on.

Grouping:

This year with my Seminar Discussions I am trying to take this group of juniors from competitors to cooperative learners. The problem is that they insist on being in some kind of competition; it is really disturbing. Students will call out their grades as I hand out papers and the lower the grade the more cheering. I cannot stop it. Nothing is private. Also, I allow student to choose their working partners when assignments call for it.

Evaluation:

I have a complete procedure list for redoing work. If students turn the assignment in on time (not late) they have options:

1. Journals may be rewritten for a better grade.
2. Essays may be rewritten and turned in with the original so I can evaluate their changes.
3. Vocabulary may be fixed by demonstrating that they understand the word and how to use it correctly. They have to find examples of the word in the outside world and show me their resources.

4. Grammar assignments are given an alternative assignment that assesses the same skill and the better of the two scores is assigned. Literature worksheets or questions may be redone for better score, improvement must be shown.

Many assignments assess skills repeatedly. If a class bombs an assignment I stop and re-teach that skill. If it is only a few students I ask them to come in before or after school and I work with them on the skill.

Time:

I believe I use the 90 minute block in a way that is beneficial to the student. If we did one thing for 90 minutes we would all be bored to tears.

I do not give extra time on assignments because I am trying to teach deadlines, but if the assignment is turned in on time students have the opportunity to fix it. Hopefully the second time they learn what they did wrong and we can eliminate the trouble spot.

Conclusion:

This was a very revealing process. In writing down my classroom practices I see what I do well and what needs work. My students would probably benefit from more choice in assignments; and as long as the skill is learned what can my objection possibly be? I also struggle with recognition. If I could find a more positive way to give feedback maybe my students wouldn't think a low score is funny.

My new changes for this school year will help. By having them discuss the pieces and make the connections they will interact with the material so much better.

I still do not know what to do to get Quantel to reach for more than just passing. I can work with him and be persistent and he will succeed in following the other rules.