

Independent Study Part 3:

After submitting and reflecting upon my first two parts of this independent study assignment, I have decided to focus in depth on my 10th grade male student, Kelly. This will be a challenging plan of action because Kelly, although not diagnosed, might have some type of bipolar disorder. There are times when Kelly is easy to communicate with, and other times, he's nearly impossible to communicate with. I have spoken with him individually multiple times to try to understand his perspective of school. In order to incorporate meaningful strategies to improve Kelly's high school experience, and to improve his academic grade in my class (which is at a near-failing level right now), I've consulted him, other teachers, educational textbooks, and sent an email home to his dad.

Kelly attended an "extra credit late show" on Thursday. He chose to NOT ride the bus home directly after school, and instead watch a movie for extra credit points for an hour after school. He consciously decided to walk 2.5 miles home in the cold, and receive seven extra credit points, instead of riding the bus home. Therefore, he clearly cares about his grade at least a little bit. It is my moral obligation as a public school teacher to incorporate teaching strategies that are not simply beneficial to my learning style, and me but to reach out to all students (especially those who DON'T perform well in school) to make school easier for them. In Kelly's feedback, she said to "consider how what these students are doing reflects their ideas about what you care about as their social studies teacher – how societies and communities negotiate systems of rules, norms, and values, goals and definitions of 'success'" (Hodges) In this sense, Kelly's resistance to stereotypic "successful behavior" may be a result of the lack of power teenagers have in our society.

Due to this aforementioned evidence, I plan to do three tangible things to ease Kelly's school experience in my classroom. The first would be to empower him through class discussion. He often raises his hand and says comments that come from nowhere. For instance, he brought up taxing Chinese imports to the U.S. to help our economy, and hinder theirs. He also brought up the "Mexican drug cartel" in a class discussion – something that I know nothing about so I chose to not discuss it. These intellectual funds that he brings to school, can and should be fostered into a meaningful experience for him and other students in my classroom. Teenagers often feel powerless, so it's my duty as a teacher to make them realize their opinions are meaningful and thus can one day shape the society they will eventually define. This idea is backed up in the text "Holler if You Hear Me," an educational text written about students who want their voice to be heard. Paloma, a 15-year old student, writes "I've had teachers who have given me inspiration, who have shown me I can be somebody" (Michie, 117). She also says, "The most important thing I learned in Media Studies is that I have a voice in society." (117) I plan to allow Kelly to discuss his thought process in my class in front of his peers, but to curve his comments in a way that empowers him, and simultaneously is educational for everyone else.

Secondly, in order to address Kelly simply putting his head down in my class for long periods of time, I will direct my classroom in a more transformative and kinetic manner. The way I have it set up right now, allows for students to "check out" and it is easy to not notice it or have to address it as the teacher. If he puts his head down during a lecture, he obviously is not disturbing anyone and thus it isn't very distracting. Obviously, that action will certainly hurt his knowledge of classroom content and thus my objective towards improving his grade in my class will not be met. I will switch up instruction every 20-25 minutes to keep him engaged and interested. The ideology behind this method is that if he wants to "talk to his friends" and doesn't perform well academically under the current system, and then I should switch up the instruction to ways in which he could actually perform well. In "Instructional Strategies for Middle and

Secondary Social Studies,” Bruce Larson and Timothy Keiper write that this analysis of how students perform individually, or a “diagnostic assessment” is key to being an effective teacher. They write, “Diagnostic assessments usually occur prior to instruction, and attempts to determine students’ strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills. Identifying these helps teachers differentiate the curriculum to meet each other’s unique needs.” (Larson and Keiper, 41) Now that I understand the atmosphere in which Kelly would be more effective in my classroom, I will adjust instruction to fit his needs and to bring his background into my classroom.

My third and final step is to take the “step-by-step intervention for goal-oriented problem solving” method for assisting Kelly in my class. I initially didn’t plan to speak with Kelly that I am doing an individualized project in my class based around him, but after asking my Independent study group they said they did not think there was anything wrong with letting Kelly know. The bulk of their advice (Steven, Jeff, and Cote) consisted of seeking out advice from Kelly (since I had yet to do this at that time) and see how he’d prefer class instruction would be changed to help his experience. This process, according to Wilmshurst and Brue, is a “four-word strategy that provides as an easy reminder to be stored in a child’s memory” (Brue, 154) the steps include “Goal, Plan, Do, and Review” so students are always clear about learning objectives. This will allow Kelly to understand that I care deeply about him and that I refuse to let him slip through the cracks in my class. I will constantly challenge him everyday to give me his best effort. Weinstein also writes in depth about students “multiple intelligences” and how vital it is to incorporate them in my classroom. Kelly undoubtedly had talents that need to be shared in my classroom. I will search deeply to find those talents and allow him to share them with the class. In addition to this, Weinstein notes that students “perceived value” of the class has a great deal to do with their importance. This intervention will require a one-on-one discussion with Kelly about why my class is important.

In closing, I think the single most important things I can do to help Kelly is to directly intervene with him. There are millions of theories to intervene with a struggle learner’s educational experience, but they all fall into one fundamental factor; caring. Weinstein writes, “Perceiving that teachers care speaks to be especially important for students who are alienated and marginalized and those who are at risk of school failure” (Weinstein, 237) Thus, this plan of action requires my intervention with Kelly in a multitude of ways, all of which should hopefully assist in his education.

Work’s Cited

1. Weinstein, Carol S. *Middle and Secondary Classroom Management*. Fourth ed. N.p.: McGraw-Hill, 2011.
2. Wilmshurst, Linda, and Alan Brue. *The Complete Guide to Special Education*. Second ed. N.p.: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
3. Larson, Bruce, and Timothy A. Keiper. *Instructional Strategies for Middle and Secondary Social Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
4. Michie, Gregory. *Holler If You Hear Me*. Second ed. New York: Teachers College Press, 2009. Print.