

# The Effect of Intervention Strategies on Senior High Reluctant Learners

An Action Research Report  
By Joe Strukel and Patti Strukel

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By Joe Strukel and Patti Strukel

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Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

This research sought to inspire reluctant learners through engagement strategies. These reluctant learners have a habit of getting *D* grades by working below their potential. The study took place with twenty students from three senior high school history classes. One teacher led an IB World History course for juniors. The other teacher instructed sophomores and juniors in American and World History. The teachers' engagement strategies included increased parental contacts and one-on-one student conferences. Through these contacts, the teachers promoted good academic performance by offering reminders about missing work and assistance on upcoming tests. Data collection sources consisted of student surveys, behavior observations, teacher journals, parental feedback logs, student goal conferences, assignment completion rates, and term grades. The data indicated improvements in attitude, in-class behaviors, and grades. Based on this research, we recommend that teachers purposefully identify reluctant learners in their classrooms and employ engagement strategies to help encourage their performance.

Reluctant learners populate our classrooms. Without a driven effort, these students almost certainly continue their pattern of “barely passing” courses. In this study, our learning team of two senior high social studies teachers is attempting to inspire these reluctant learners. The students affected are history students in tenth and eleventh grades who receive *D* grades. We feel the problem is primarily one of attitude, particularly one of apathy. We suspect that potential contributing factors include a lack of motivation, peer acceptance, and unintentional parental tolerance. We are addressing this by utilizing an affective “attitude inventory”, parental invitations to conferences, more one-on-one meetings with students, and better promotion of good academic performance. In addition, the two of us are conscientiously and consistently weaving humor and relevance into our lessons to help capture these students. We are looking for results by checking work completion data and grading terms from October through March. Our goal is to reduce the number of students getting *Ds* in our courses.

The setting for this study is Stockton Junior-Senior High School in Stockton, Minnesota. Our building, the Junior-Senior High School, is the largest of the four schools in the district. The school district has a total enrollment of approximately 1750 students K-12 from most of Jasper County, including the communities of Stockton, Porter, and Newville. Over the past three decades, Stockton has struggled with a combination of declining enrollment, growing poverty rates and an increasingly diverse and needy student population. The Junior-Senior High School houses students in grades seven through twelve and has about 140 students in each grade level. The classes in this study ranged in size from 20 to 30 students. The participants in this study are regular education students. One of these classes is part of the International Baccalaureate

program, which offers a more advanced set of expectations without specific aptitude qualifications. Seven participants are enrolled in tenth grade American History, six are in eleventh grade World History and Geography, and seven are in I.B. World History.

District-wide and site goals based on federal and state requirements over the past three years have urged teachers to address the achievement gaps that exist in our school. A major focus at our site has been to reduce the number of students getting grades at the *D* or *F* level because it has been determined that these students are not grasping the essential curriculum. Of particular concern are students who earn a *D*-level grade in a course because these students pass the course and receive credit for the class. Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) use the term *reluctant learners* to describe students who “choose not to participate in school learning experiences” (p. 35). These reluctant learners do not master the essential curriculum. Instead, they perform at a level that allows them to avoid repeating a course – but no higher than that. Occasionally this “plan” results in a failure, but more serious interventions rarely ensue because the student does not seem in need of such services.

Exploring how teachers can respond to students like this, our research presented numerous approaches. If students deem the adult response as punishment, they also conclude that they fulfilled their initial expectation of failure (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). Thus, a delicate balancing act ensues in which the teacher compels the student to succeed without threatening dire consequences for the alternative. Furthermore, the behaviors are so contrived that “accepting failure has become a strategy for not having to try” (2006, para. 5). As teachers, this attitude is one of the features that our efforts must override.

According to our research, the first step toward engagement is building daily lessons around “interesting curriculum” (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p. 54). If the curriculum does not naturally lend itself to this, the teacher may need to employ more developed tactics to build a case for the intrinsic value of learning the material. In *Motivating Students Who Don’t Care*, Allen Mendler (2000) advises, “Difficult students need to know that they are wanted” (p. 48). Teachers know they need to make a conscious effort to extend themselves to these students. However, the detachment is such that the students themselves cannot correlate their inaction with the lagging results (Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006). The extension of the teacher’s investment in the student, then, needs to reach beyond the curriculum as well. An additional prong of the teacher’s efforts to motivate reluctant learners is through enlisting parental support. The general achievement benefits derived from parental support range from homework completion to attitude toward school (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005, p. 100). Creating an atmosphere of hope is needed to stimulate reluctant learners. Although many elements are being addressed in prompting these learners to try harder, ultimately the learners themselves must initiate active changes. Children who feel there is hope are more likely to confront learning situations with appropriate initiative and tactics to get a desirable outcome (Soares, Lemos, and Almeida, 2005). Teachers who provide informing and constructive feedback are likely to help reluctant learners reduce the perception that grading is simply a product of “luck or teacher favoritism”, so they will not take ownership for their results (Gonzalez, 2002, para. 6). In her book, *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners, Grades 3-12*, Diane Heacox urges grading practices that are meaningful in

helping learners to see where they are in the learning continuum (2002). Using a well-designed rubric with clear criteria is likely to meet these ends. Collectively, our research expresses that a multi-faceted approach to dealing with reluctant learners is the most likely way to positively impact student motivation and achievement.

In looking at the needs of our school and the large percentage of students who fit this profile, the concept of stimulating reluctant learners emerges as an area worth addressing. As teachers, on both a personal and professional level, there is nothing more frustrating than watching a capable student accept deficient efforts and results. On the contrary, there may be nothing more rewarding than helping a reluctant learner full of doubt and apathy become a committed student full of confidence and interest. The Action Research Question we are exploring is: What is the impact of engagement strategies on reducing the number of reluctant learners in senior high social studies classes?

#### Description of Research Process

In our study, we decided to address what we perceive as attitude deficiencies in social studies students in tenth and eleventh grades. Specifically, we targeted students who receive *D* grades. We suspected that potential contributing factors included a lack of motivation, peer acceptance, and unintentional parental tolerance. The subjects were identified by November 15, 2007, with strategies employed for the next four months, and the study concluding on March 7, 2008. With respect to our school calendar, this study began early in the second quarter continued through the middle of third quarter. Our data collection procedures included: (1) student surveys, (2) formal behavior observations, (3) teacher journals, (4) parental feedback logs, (5) student/teacher goal-setting conferences, (6) assignment completion rates, (7) midterm, quarter, and semester grades.

In an attempt to engage the selected reluctant learners, we employed a series of strategies. The strategies pursued the reluctant learner in terms of teacher and parent support, feedback strategies, and one-on-one conversations between the teachers and students involved. The teacher support efforts included energizing daily lessons, enhancing the intrinsic value of learning the material, and engaging the student from a more personal level. The teachers also extended themselves through the gateway of the students' parents. Parents were asked to encourage homework completion and foster a positive attitude toward school. Teacher feedback for the work these students completed strove to meet the criteria of being specific, prompt, and meaningful. In particular, the teachers utilized rubrics and pushed themselves to return student work within three school days of its completion. The one-on-one conversations between the teachers and their students revolved around goals for unit assessments and term grades. However, the teachers sought to mix flexibility with protocol so the communication did not take on a rigid tone. Additional one-on-one contacts by the teachers occurred when the students were missing assigned tasks or displaying behaviors counterproductive to meeting achievement goals.

To determine which students received the intervention strategies, characteristics of reluctant learners needed to be identified within our class populations. Initially, to identify which students best fit our description of a reluctant learner and to create a baseline measurement of the perceptions and attitudes of these students, we administered a survey to our classes. In our survey, there were fifteen statements that gave students five Likert scale answer options (see Appendix A). For each statement, we determined what answer on a 1-5 scale would indicate the greatest degree of "reluctance". Thus, the

score reflecting the highest correlation with our description of a reluctant learner on this survey would have been 75. Students we selected met the criteria of being *D* students in our classes and scoring in the 25-40 range on our survey. Interestingly, we noticed that we needed to eliminate a number of *A* students who also expressed feelings consistent with reluctance and fell in this same range. Determining that their feelings surfaced for different reasons, we did not pursue these students for our study. Each student in the study completed a second survey as well. Analysis was completed on both a whole score and itemized basis to see how the strategies impacted student attitudes.

Prior to taking further steps, we informed the students we had selected that we requested their participation in a study we were doing. We recorded their initial reactions to this request. At that point, our next data collection step was to document student behavior on a class day. We designed a formal behavior observation form to ensure that the data collected was consistent (see Appendix B). Our observations included verbal, nonverbal, intentional, and unintentional indications of the students' academic involvement. We also recorded journal observations about specific student behaviors pertinent to the study and a brief description of the class activities on the days of the observations. This observation was done confidentially without student knowledge of the procedure or the behaviors being noted. Such observations occurred at intervals throughout the study.

Parental involvement was another component of this study. Although parental consent for the study was received, only some reluctant learners' parents opted to participate in the deeper level of being part of the engagement process. When we received confirmation of parental involvement, we recorded the parent comments. Only

one parent deliberately refused to participate, but others simply did not respond to written requests for participation. Feedback from parents was gathered throughout the study as well. Contact with these parents occurred through phone calls, emails, and in person.

In order to exhibit a greater degree of personal concern for these students, one-on-one conferences were held with these students. The protocol for conferences was to inform students of their current grades, any tasks they had not completed for the class, and to ask the students what goals they had for upcoming tests. No particular sidebars were pursued in these conferences, but if they came up “naturally”, they were welcomed. Depending on the circumstances, projected grades for quarter and semester markings were provided.

Academic records particular to the course that provided additional data to determine baseline, progress, and conclusion levels were collected as well. Included in these collections were assignment completion rates and term grades. Collecting this information at various times provided numerous checkpoints at which to evaluate student progress.

In carrying out these processes, we aimed to increase the academic focus of students, underscore the inherent value of learning, and improve students' grades in our classes. Collectively, these engagement strategies have lofty ambitions for these reluctant learners; will they respond favorably to these efforts? The next section of this paper will examine the impact these teacher actions had on the reluctant learners.

#### Analysis of Data

To trace student progress in response to our increased involvement in their performance, we analyzed the data we collected at various stages of this project. Student

attitude survey totals, formal behavior observation checklists, and teacher journals all examined performance on a before-after basis. Parental feedback logs primarily reflected their responses to the students' grades so far this school year in the classes examined. The goal-setting conference data collected mainly anecdotal responses from students as they projected upcoming grades and reacted to grade updates. The culminating piece of data is the students' grading portrait from week five of the school year through week twenty-five, with snapshots of the term grades.

The survey statements requested that students respond on a Likert scale to provide information about their attitudes toward school. After collecting the responses, we devised a way of scoring the data to indicate the students' level of reluctance. The higher the student score was, the more reluctant the tendencies of that student. The intervention strategies that we adopted as teachers were implemented during these months. In consolidating the data from the first survey (completed in November) with the second survey (completed in January), we measured the attitude change according to this affective survey. As shown in Figure 1, the survey totals reflected attitude improvements in 15 of the 20 students. Three students showed a more negative attitude toward school in the second survey, and two students showed no change in the second survey.

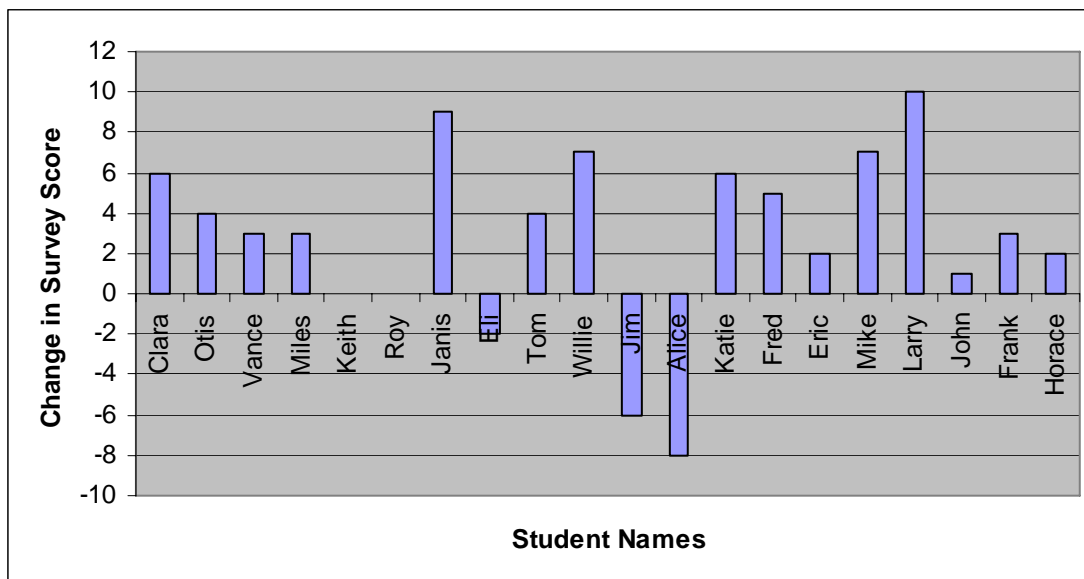


Figure 1. Attitude survey changes from November to January.

Examining the profiles of the six students whose scores rose between six and ten points leads us toward additional observations. The students with the highest improvement rates, Larry and Janis, became visibly better students on a daily basis. Larry had been a student who chronically put his head down on his desk and slept during class; he is now a self-initiating student who is clearly engaged in class activities. He contributes to class discussion on a regular basis. Joe thinks that the keys to his relationship with Larry are that he employs humor daily, keeping Larry's interest, and that he has shown an interest in Larry's performance without being pushy. Patti thinks that she has reached Janis by exhibiting a genuine "I'm rooting for you to do well in this class" feeling. The signals that this was at least part of the equation came in the form of Janis's reactions to the individual meetings. In our first conference, she did not make eye contact and seemed uneasy. By our third goal conference, Janis approached Patti with an air of openness and interest in the grade update, as well as answering, "B" confidently when asked what her goal on the next test was. Janis seems to feel like she has a teacher

that she does not want to let down and became a little teary-eyed at the compliment, “You’re really doing well,” at the end of first semester. With the other top gainers in this category, the changes are much more subtle and inconsistent. However, in general, they seem less likely to give up quickly when faced with a challenging task.

The attitude survey did not measure some of the casual observations we have made. Some of these students’ names will surface again among those whose grades improved, and yet, some of them will not attain that status. Eric and John fit the reluctant learner profile in numerous ways this fall. In particular, they both exhibited a low self-concept in the classroom. This carried over into negative or stagnant behaviors. Joe has made a point of visiting with these boys on a regular basis, and they truly appear to enjoy the conversations. They are junior boys who are struggling with some of the hierarchical sorting that tends to happen in extra-curricular activities. In Joe, they have found someone who is sensitive to their plight while shedding perspective on what they are experiencing. He does not dismiss their concerns, but he also avoids enabling negative behaviors.

Eli and Alice are two other students who have responded well in casual observations. Socially, they are part of a tangent to the student mainstream, and that seems to frustrate them. They are not high achievers in any of their classroom or extra-curricular activities, but they are both involved in enough activities to compare themselves to those students a lot. They both wear their emotions on their sleeves, so they tend to show despair on a regular basis. Patti has been able to give them the attention they desire in expressing themselves, which almost seems to extinguish their need to elaborate further. They do not stop their sharing abruptly, but they gradually nudge back into the

task at hand in most cases. Peer influences sometimes leave them reeling for longer spells though, so Patti has to monitor that closely. What Patti has really noticed with these students is that they respond extremely well to analogies of historical events compared with school social issues. Anytime she uses an illustration like this, Eli and Ali are quick to ask follow-up questions and add augmentations enthusiastically.

Otis is another attitude success story whose daily interactions are disproportionate to the attitude survey improvement. This sophomore detached himself from class on a daily basis, even through December. Patti thinks that familiarity and a sense of trust developed as she showed concern for Otis's performance in class. The most obvious difference is that he now walks into the classroom smiling. He also went from getting lost in the shuffle with group activities to finding ways to positively contribute to their objectives.

While many conclusions developed from casual observations, as researchers, we charted behavior on a more formal level as well. The formal behavior observations occurred three times in each of our classes. Activities taking place in class varied with each observation. The teachers noted negative student behaviors on a checklist. With the checklist being a relatively simple measurement of the student behaviors, supplemental information was gathered through teacher journals. The number of passive-negative behaviors dropped in all of the students. Passive-negative behaviors would include "inactions" like needing prompting to start and purposefully hiding. Active-negative behaviors like reacting adversely to teacher and denying an offer of help were completely eliminated in the second and third observations. The teacher journals reported a number of instances in which the reluctant learners actually behaved in an active-positive way

during the third observation. Smiling, laughing at appropriate times, and initiating both responses and questions became common on observation days as well as other times of interaction, both in and out of class.

An additional source of data was feedback garnered from parents of these students. Although we made contacts to these parents throughout the study, the amount of active parental response to our contacts primarily arose initially when we requested their assistance in being more involved in their students' academic lives and in late February in a parent-teacher conference. Upon the request for increased participation to help implement these intervention strategies, most parents were cooperative. As information like upcoming test dates and missing assignments were shared with the parents and guardians, it became difficult to tell which parents really were actively cooperating. Parents and guardians in our school have access to student grades through our online grading program, so general monitoring of progress can occur without our direct knowledge. Sometimes our calls or emails went unanswered. One interesting fact that we uncovered was that three of the reluctant learners did not have active phone numbers or email addresses on record with the school. In order to schedule parent-teacher conferences, the students actually had to provide their home phone numbers to the teacher.

In this study, we intervened through parent contacts. All participants in the study did not have "equal" parental representation in the intervention process. Thus, the study mimicked actual classroom experiences in that respect. Eli's mother was extremely candid upon being approached for this study in saying, "We'll do what we can, but I just want you to know that we have been having a lot of trouble with him lately." Other

parents were more passive, but agreed to join us for parent-teacher conferences in late February. The timing of the conferences fell into the third quarter's midterm collection point. The setting of these conferences was on a scheduled evening for such meetings, but in the context of private conversations arranged by appointment. In some cases, the student was present for the conference. Unfortunately, some parents of participants did not respond to these appointment requests or simply did not keep their appointments. When we examine the student progress in grades by time period, we will explore this issue more deeply. For the parents or guardians that we visited with, a renewed sense of purpose developed for all parties, it seemed.

At each conference, the teachers in this study provided a grade update as well as data regarding previous grade terms and assignment completion. After the overview portion, we completed a series of interview questions with each parent (see Appendix C). Through this exchange, definite themes emerged in the collective experiences of these students and their parents.

To examine these themes, we have labeled them within the categories of obstacles and responses. The three main obstacles that these students experience, according to their parents, are social, maturity, and skill acquisition issues. Examples of social issues include insecurity and academic inadequacy, as perceived compared to peers. With maturity issues, parents expressed much frustration because these were clearly cases of the kids falling short in areas the parents had been urging like prioritizing time and being responsible for completing work. With skill acquisition, previous years of schooling in which the student had been able to pass without truly understanding material or being able to execute a particular skill consistently was another common experience.

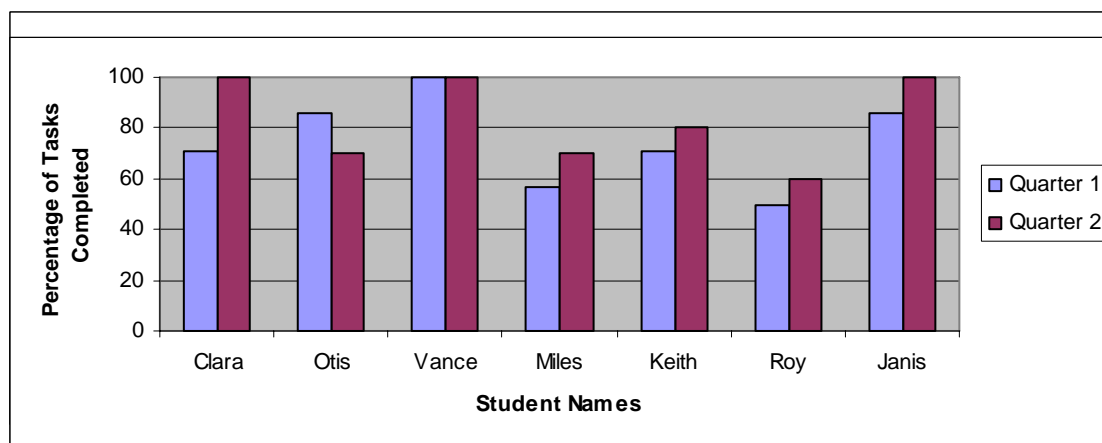
We also found trends in how the parents of the participants in our study who attended conferences responded to their children's academic needs. Parents reported that they were conversing with their children about academic progress and career paths. A second trend that became apparent during these conversations was that these parents were definitely encouraging their children, despite past and present struggles. The absence of some parents from parent-teacher conferences that they were invited to attend indicates a third trend: apathy. Unfortunately, an apathetic parent and an apathetic student create a poisonous environment for academic success.

The parents who attended these conferences, for the most part, represent the students who made the greatest gains in this study. Thus, it would not be considered a representative sampling of our entire study population. Yet, the parents shared revealing comments when asked about their children's attitudes. Of the four parents that Joe interviewed, three interviewees had noticed attitude improvement during the course of the school year. For the seven sets of parents that Patti interviewed, six reported attitude gains since the study had begun. The parents did not specifically comment on the source of the improved attitudes, nor were they asked to do so.

Signs of improving attitudes appeared to us when we cycled through our second round of goal-setting conferences. The goal-setting conferences asked students to share a target grade for an upcoming test. It was also an opportunity to directly update the students on their course grade and inform them of any missing work. The first set of conferences with students followed a methodical pattern. Students performed the ritual with little vigor. By the second and third conferences, the reluctant learners exhibited eagerness in sharing that they were aiming for a higher grade this time or asked follow-up

questions when informed of missing work. The students seemed to genuinely appreciate that we had set aside class time to converse about their past and future performance. A few exceptions within our population, even at the time of the third conference, would offer that a particular missing task would be in the next day and fail to deliver on that promise. Even in less formal times of reminding, these students continued to say the right words while doing the wrong actions – undoubtedly, some of those assignments are still missing.

While attitudes, observations, parent contacts, and goal-setting conferences help evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions, the most objective measurement emerges in examining these students' grades. For most of the reluctant learners in Patti's classes, assignment completion rate was the key factor which determined the route of the students' grades from first quarter to second quarter. Joe's classes only had a total of six daily assignments in the first two quarters, so that data was not included in this study. Due to student absences and midterm being a more informal checkpoint, we did not examine the completion rate at the third midterm. As Figures 2 and 3 illustrate, Patti's interventions helped her students turn in more completed work.



*Figure 2.* Assignment completion rates for American History Sophomores.

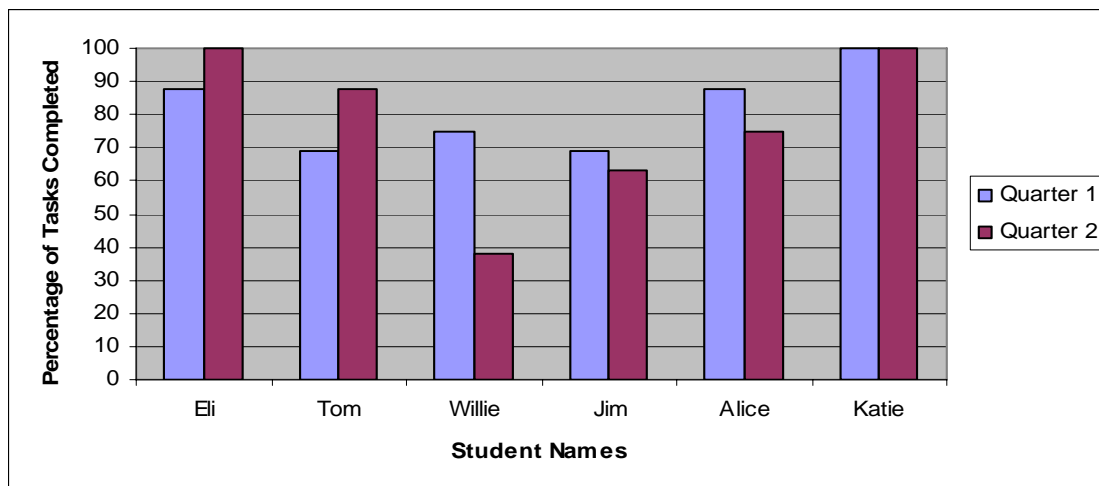


Figure 3. Assignment completion rates for World History Juniors.

While completion rates were a key determinant, they did not account for quality of student work. Examining student grades provided these pieces of data over the course of the study. Since these reluctant learners were students we maintained from the beginning of the year through March, we were able to gauge their progress over that time span. The results appear in Tables 1-3.

Table 1

*Grades – October through March, 2007-8, American History Sophomores*

Student	Midterm 1	Quarter 1	Midterm 2	Quarter 2	Pre-midterm 3	Post-midterm 3
Clara	F	D	B	B-	F	C-
Otis	C	D+	C	C	D+	C
Vance	C	C-	C+	C+	C+	C+
Miles	D+	D-	C+	C-	D+	C+
Keith	D	D+	C	C-	F	C
Roy	C-	D	C+	C-	C+	D+
Janis	D-	D+	B-	B-	C-	B

Table 2

*Grades – October through March, 2007-8, IB World History Juniors*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Midterm 1</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Midterm 2</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>	<b>Pre-midterm 3</b>	<b>Post-midterm 3</b>
Fred	B-	B-	C-	C-	C	C
Eric	F	D-	C	C	C-	C-
Mike	D-	D	D+	F	C	C
Larry	C	B-	B-	B-	C+	C+
John	F	D	D	C-	B-	B-
Frank	D+	C-	C+	D	C	C
Horace	D-	D+	B+	B+	D	D

Table 3

*Grades – October through March, 2007-8, World History Juniors*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Midterm 1</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Midterm 2</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>	<b>Pre-midterm 3</b>	<b>Post-midterm 3</b>
Eli	D-	D+	C+	C	B-	C
Tom	C-	D	C+	B-	D+	D+
Willie	D+	D+	F	F	D+	D-
Jim	B-	D+	D+	D-	C-	D-
Alice	C+	D+	D+	C-	C+	B
Katie	F	D+	C+	C+	F	B

The first four checkpoints applied were all typical grading periods. The last column in Tables 1-3 reflected the culmination of all steps because the parent conferences took place when the third midterm was posted. When examining the final grade in this study for each reluctant learner, it is apparent that the strategies worked for most of these students. The purpose of our study was to help pull students' grades higher than the *D* range, a grade that indicates that curriculum is not being mastered. At the end of second quarter, 16 of the 20 students were at a *C-* or higher. At the end of the study, 15 of the 20 students were at a *C-* or higher. Another notable statistic is that eight of these students attained a grade in the *B* range at one of these two main checkpoints.

In conclusion, this data represented that the interventions we used improved the performance of the reluctant learners in our classroom. We were most surprised at the number of students who leaped up to the *B* range, and – if nothing else – we gained a greater understanding of the students who would still be considered reluctant learners. The behavior and performance of each of these twenty students did not vary much at the onset of our study. With each intervention, the range of behavior and performance expanded. Many of these students are now indiscernible from the best students in our classes. The next step of our project will be to devise an Action Plan based on our results.

#### Action Plan

As this study concludes, it offers a promising outlook. Through this study, we have experienced professional efficacy. As educators, we were able to identify a problem that we have both observed throughout our careers, research various descriptions of this problem, and further articulate the nature and sources of the problem. Furthermore, we were able to design and implement solutions – much in the way that a doctor treats symptoms. In most of the cases we had diagnosed, we saw student performance respond favorably in multiple measurements.

In the past, neither of us had systematically targeted *D* students or reluctant learners. Rather, we had typically pigeonholed all *D* and *F* students into one category whose grades we sought to improve. By starting with the broad demographic of *D* and *F* students, we determined which of them best exhibited the characteristics of reluctant learners. This is a process that we must do in the future as we make decisions about the allotment of our professional resources, namely time. While neither of us would refuse to help any student, the concept that all *D*s and *F*s are not the same rang true in this project.

The reluctant learners who did not have more serious problems like substance abuse (as was shared in a parent-teacher conference regarding one student who did not improve from this study) improved in attitude, in-class behaviors, work completion rates, and grades.

However, with these senior high school students, the reluctant learner behaviors were engrained so deeply that we concluded that we could not drift from monitoring the study habits and progress on daily work. The attitude and in-class behaviors showed more sustained improvement, while the work completion rates and grades remained very fluid. As the attitudes improved, though, the role of the teacher as one who pesters students to turn work in was more warmly received by these reluctant learners. Throughout the course of the study, the students definitely sensed the teachers' earnestness and tended to respond in a productive academic manner.

Simply paying attention to students who are struggling can make a difference for some. Building relationships can help others improve. When the relationships that are built transcend the academic struggles without ignoring that they exist, the doors open for meaningful conversations about what students need to do in order to achieve at their potential. We have heard colleagues discuss the idea of a particular student being a "project" before, and this is a formalized version of that response designed to meet the needs of a particular realm of students. For both of us, this has been a rewarding experience. To witness the turn-around that some of these students have shown from September to March has been among our most rewarding educational experiences. Not only has this brought us a sense of job satisfaction, but it has also tamed a problem that we had previously considered an inevitable irritant.

For the students involved in this project, the gains in attitude and classroom behavior were sustained in our classes. Longitudinally, will this be true? Will these gains carry into other classes? We do not know the answers to these questions. We speculate that some of the conversations we have had to reinforce their actions will help them see that their improvement was not an accident; rather that it was something that they controlled. We may have helped direct the circumstances surrounding their improvement, but they determined their own course. Although our study reached its end for these students, we will need to continue encouraging them.

Clearly, as the study continued, all of our reluctant learners needed prodding. Work ethic was not a habit yet. Some of these students have such an engrained pattern of behavior that it appeared almost instinctive to let a *B* slip to a *D* within two weeks – whether the decreased grade occurred due to absences, missing work, or a bad test. Another common trait of these students is to carry such low expectations for themselves that a higher grade is treated like a buffer that can simply be eroded as the end of a term approaches. These characteristics are practices that the students need to have pointed out to them, almost in the “I’m on to your scheme” sense. When we pointed out these ebbs and flows to our reluctant learners, their typical response was a wry grin, perhaps as a mild admission of guilt. Sometimes the self-awareness of a senior high student is heightened by someone shedding light on their behaviors.

Furthermore, our reluctant learners needed to know that they had names and faces in our classrooms. Part of the reluctant learner method is to disappear in anonymity. Because they were not allowed to be faceless and nameless in our classes, again, we hope that these students translate this lesson into future academic successes. Some of these

reluctant learners actually became less shy and detached in class activities during these months. Asking questions and being engaged paid dividends.

Future investigations triggered by this project would include looks at various sub-groups within the reluctant learner population. First of all, we would like to examine how strategies aimed at reluctant male learners could help this seemingly overrepresented part of the demographic perform better academically. Secondly, we would like to address the particular skill weakness that reluctant learners with a deficiency in reading or writing exhibit. Our hypotheses tell us that our interventions could be even more effective if we structured them accordingly. Coordinating one's professional efforts toward reaching students who are reluctant to learn is a painstaking process with the potential of a positive impact on struggling students.

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## APPENDIX A

**Student Opinion Survey**

**Identify your “Scantron” form with your student NUMBER only. You do *not* need to provide your name.**

*Directions:* Read each statement carefully and indicate on the “Scantron” form how much you agree or disagree with it by filling in the appropriate letter (A through E).

*Key:*

- SA – Strongly Agree
- A – Agree
- NS – Not Sure
- D – Disagree
- SD – Strongly Disagree

1. Doing well in school is important to me.
2. I am willing to help others understand their school work.
3. I find most academic learning to be pointless.
4. I am afraid that working hard at school will cause my friends to make fun of me.
5. I find that teachers’ standards are impossible to meet.
6. My peers are unfriendly to me at school.
7. Teacher favoritism results in better grades for some students.
8. I get better grades in vocational classes.
9. My attitude at school causes others to want to be around me.
10. I do not expect to graduate.
11. I do not like working with other students.
12. I am not sure why a high school diploma is important.
13. At school, I spend most of my time alone.
14. Grading is more of a result of luck than skill.



## APPENDIX C

**PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE PROTOCOL**

1. In looking at your child's grades, what reactions do you have?
2. What other activities, on which you have insight, might be influencing what we are seeing from your child?
3. How would you describe your child's attitude toward school?
4. What kinds of conversations do you and your child have about school?
5. Have you and your child discussed his/her career plans?
6. What frustrations related to school has your child exhibited or shared?
7. What seems to encourage your child's best efforts and work quality?