The Effect of Accountability in School Performance
Nadia B. Robles
Gunston Middle School
Arlington County (VA) Public Schools
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Background
As a first year science teacher, I began my year wondering “how I could help my students to be successful in school, how could I motivate them to succeed?” As time went on, I wondered more and more why so many minority (ESL) students were doing poorly in school. In my mind, since I was also an ESL student-- an immigrant whose parent’s goal was to provide a better future for their kids-- I thought that the ESL students will be a little more mature and more appreciative of what they have. To my surprise I found that the ESL/HILT students who excited the program became complacent to the feelings of their peers. They seemed to give up, to not do their homework, and as a result do poorly in their classes.

As I tried different methods of teaching such us including the multiple intelligence theory, analogies, and demonstrations; I found that they needed more individual attention. Many had the desire to do well, but they gave in to laziness, so the question arose “How could I help them overcome this weakness” and I thought about their home environment. Many of these students seemed not to have much support from their home nor accountability. Many of the immigrant parents work two shifts, some do not understand the importance of schooling, some are caught up on all the additional problems that come with living in a new country, and many other reasons. It is here that I began to wonder what the effects on accountability were with their success in school. I compared this group with my intensify immersion class and looked at the difference on accountability.

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to investigate the affects of accountability in a successful school performance. In order to do this, I looked at a pool of students with a straight E record in my class. While doing this, I also noticed that my class was not the only class in which they were failing.

I first approached this question by taking a survey to find some of the reasons to their lack of success in classes (grades). Then I began to meet with them one on one to find a group that is willing and responsive to accountability. I worked with this group of minority students by keeping them accountable, by providing a place for them to catch up with their work, and to socialize, which is one of their main “needs.” While doing this, I continued to create more engaging and interesting lessons to see how motivation and interest compare with accountability in successful school performance.
Literature Review

In previous research by Louis Roemer from Louisiana Tech University and the partnership of Zion Hill Baptist Church, undertook a tutoring program in which undergraduate students worked with elementary to high school students. In this research they found that the students generally improved by at least two letter grades. They also found that a student reported to a tutor that she had gone on to veterinary school, and that she remembered with affection the gift of a book of Maya Angelou’s poetry. In addition all students often looked forward to meet with their tutor and the research showed that the number of minority students entering into the fields of engineering and sciences increased.

Moreover, in research done by Campbell and Werner from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (U.S. Department of Education) they found that research shows that students who overcome what the research calls “devastated backgrounds” tend to have one thing in common- a caring adult outside of the family who is “on their side” and most frequently that adult is a teacher. In the same way, I found in my research that accountability, encouragement, and evidence of personal interest in them made a huge difference. It seemed that the student’s ears where open to listen to you, and want to learn from you, and accept your help.

In addition, in research from the Hayes Mizeel Reader, they listed some essential elements of self-accountability and of holding schools accountable, this included:

1. Acceptance of responsibility
2. Shared responsibility
3. Initiative and Inquiry
4. Assessment
5. Full disclosure (openness)
6. Professional development

In the same way my research did involved all of this steps to a certain extreme. When I approached the students I did not tell them the specifics of conducting this research but the truth, which was to help them improve. At that emotional age if I told them it was for a research they would think, I did it for the project and not for them, and this would have gotten in the way of my research. While talking to the students, I tried to get as much commitment as possible and did give them an incentive which was to take them out bowling after improving their grades. Moreover, there were shared responsibilities, I tried my best to encourage them and reminded them of the choice to stay after school. They had a responsibility to do their work and take the first step, which was to choose to stay and say no to laziness or the general feeling “I don’t feel like it”. In addition, there were assessments which included test, assignments, labs, and projects.
There was full disclosure, in the way that we had to be honest. Here, we had
good and respectful conversations. The kids felt that I was their friend and we
did have fun together. And lastly, there was professional development; we all
learned together, and I worked with them just like a partner.

All these previous researched helped me guide and encourage my ideas
on the topic. Many of the hypothesis I formed through observation where
supported by previous researched already done in this topic.

Data and Observations

1. **Survey**: The purpose of this survey was to find out the student’s reasons
   for doing and not doing well in school.

   1. What was your grade during 3rd Quarter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   2. What would you have liked your grade to be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

   3. Why do you think you got that grade? Be honest!
   4. If you had the chance to repeat 3rd Quarter all over again, what would you do different?
   5. If you get good grades (B’s and A’s) why do you do it? What is your motivation?
   6. If you get D’s and E’s, why do you?

Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Successful Grade (A’s &amp; B’s)</th>
<th>Unsuccessful grade (E’s and D’s)</th>
<th>Motivation/ Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>To go to college, pass HS, for a better future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation: they like it, is fun, for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rewards (positive &amp; negative reinforcement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Did not do work/ laziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Because of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Not interested/boring/ did not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
91.6% of the students taking the survey said that the reason for doing and not doing well in class was because they did or did not do their work.

2. Individual Accountability

In this area of my research I looked at a list of students who were doing very poorly (all E’s) and at the same time who were willing and/or had the desire to improve. I approached every student and talked to them about improving their grades and seeing if I could get any type of commitment or “fidelity” on their part. Like Roemer’s noted in her research “Students fidelity, too, is a problem. They have many forces pulling on them, from economic pressures, studies, to family responsibilities”

Out of that list I selected 4 students to be my focus. I was committed to remind them constantly, to encourage them, to try to find them before they left, and to help them the most. All other students, even the ones who were doing well, were also welcome to come after school and work in my room. After school I provided some snacks, help in my class and some movies and games for when they were done with the work. During this time, I had many opportunities for several conversations about life in general, character, about what is best for them, about the future, and about themselves and their decisions.

In one occasion, a student was complaining about why she should be in a Spanish class (she was in the immersion program, in which the goal is to become totally bilingual). With this, I gave her a scenario of the future, we picked a job and salary for her, we did a budget, and with this she realized the importance of a good education and the blessing that it is to be bilingual. She was so interested afterwards, that she even wanted to keep the paper in which we wrote down her budget. In addition, I also heard many positive comments and saw that their desire and interest about science increased in general. Two of the students were amazed on how they got an A in my class. That concept was sometimes a little hard to believe for them. On another occasion, one of my students came really happy to my classroom telling me how good it felt to do a “good deed”. Which deed? I asked; she simply chose to sit next to a girl who was sitting all by herself and started to talk to her. Wow, I was amazed to see how much joy and enlightenment was on her face that day. That day she was concentrated on others rather than on herself and that made a huge difference on her attention in my class and her mood.

In the table below, you will see some of the students I worked with and the final grades for each quarter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>1st quarter</th>
<th>2nd quarter</th>
<th>3rd quarter</th>
<th>4th quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>E (in all classes also)</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As you can see, there were 3 main students that I was working with, the other student (Nelson), was not very faithful staying after school. In addition, it was also hard for me to really connect with Nelson, he was more interested in the reward, in fact, he wanted the reward before he did any work and he was hard to control when I had a group working in my classroom. Moreover, Imran came in later in the 3rd quarter. His desire to improve varied, but towards the end, he wanted to “hang out” in my classroom and even clean my room after he did all his work. I started to talk to him one-on-one and got to know him better; and in the same way, he seemed to trust me more and always wanted to run errands for me. His grades in all his classes increased tremendously. There was also another student who I wanted to help. His parents were supportive, but He was always avoiding or “escaping” from me and did not want to stay after school. He needed a lot of individual attention. And as a result his grades were E’s and D’s in all classes. The times in which I did help him (when he was all by himself), we did accomplish many things, but he would not stay regularly.

Through all of this, I observed the amazing change in attitude. When the student was away from his peers he would be different; the student would be more calm, and easy to talk to. With his peers, however, the student would be more playful and often wanted to be the center of attention.

Conclusion

As you could see from my survey 91.6% of the students success is due to the fact that they do the work. In the same way about 80% of the students say they would do so much better if they did the work. In addition, the greatest reason why the students didn’t do the work was because of laziness. To improve this area, I chose to research the effect of accountability. I saw that accountability did matter and contributed to the student’s success. I also saw that a personal connection with the student made a huge different for accountability. If the student did not trust you and did not know you very well, then the student would not be likely to stay and do the work. This connection opened the doors for trust and honesty. This trust and availability, made a huge difference to open their minds for learning. They saw that class as a strength rather than weakness and they enjoyed it.

I also saw that having treats, providing some food to do work and study would also encourage the students. I also observed that the group needed to be a small. If the group was too big, it caused too many distractions and “temptations” to talk and do less work. In a small group, they encourage each other by working together and getting good grades. One time I had a students who wanted to keep going and going to see how his grade improved by doing more work. In closing, this whole experience was very beneficial and
encouraging for me. I rejoiced greatly to see their improvement and the students working with me, felt good and more confident about them selves. I even observed Karla obtained one of the highest score in the practice SOL’s. If confidence opens the mind for learning, it is imperative that adults spend one-one-one times (tutoring) with students.

References