Case Summary

“Keith” is a typical fourth grade boy. He is talkative and social with the other students in the class. He has a fair complexion and fiery red hair, and his every emotion instantly shows on his face with a deep flush. He has demonstrated some negative attitudes and behaviors and has a very quick temper. He does come to school each day generally prepared (backpack in hand, required notes signed), but has had a problem keeping his assignments organized and ready to turn in. He does have all of the required work supplies that he needs (paper, pencil, folder, etc.) and uses them (although these same supplies sometimes cause a distraction as will be discussed later). He starts off the day paying attention to his teacher and listening to all directions.

Keith begins all of his assignments seemingly poised to complete them without any problems. He does not ask any questions of his teacher while she is giving instructions or conducting the discussion and he appears to understand all that has been presented. He shows attentive body language and keeps eye contact. He offers answers in class discussions and lessons. His teacher has no reason to feel that he is having trouble understanding the directions or that he is confused about what is expected of him.

About a fourth of the way into any particular assignment, Keith begins to drift off. He starts talking to his neighbors, rummaging through his desk, or walking around the room. He
stops working on the questions. His teacher notices his distraction and asks him to please continue working and to cease the talking. Keith doesn’t like to get in trouble and stops talking. Keith shows emotion easily in his face and instantly his cheeks flush. He picks up his pencil and appears to start working again. A few minutes later, the teacher again notices Keith whispering and giggling with those around him. He also finds many distractions in the form of school supplies such as pencils, pens, erasers, paper, etc. Keith notices the teacher watching him, and not wanting to get into any trouble, pretends to again start working. Later, his teacher walks over to his desk to check his progress. He is no further along than when he first began talking. She asks if he needs any help. He nods “no” and turns red. She leaves him alone for now and will return a few more times; the whole process repeats a few more times with no more progress from Keith.

In an attempt to “motivate” the stragglers in the group, the teacher announces that the students who have completed the assignment will be able to go outside for recess and those with work left to do will have to remain inside. Keith suddenly begins to rush to complete his assignment that others around him have long finished so he can join them for recess. He does not understand the assignment but he doesn’t want to get into trouble or receive a bad grade for writing nonsense. Again, his teacher notices that he is not working. She asks him if he needs any assistance. He replies “no”. Most of the class is then allowed to go outside for recess, leaving Keith and three other students in the classroom to work. The other three students are receiving assistance from the teacher with their questions so they can join the others for recess. Keith waits for all three of his classmates to go outside before he finally asks the teacher for help. He did not want anyone to know that he was having difficulty completing the assignment.
Keith started acting this way around the second grade. He seems to prefer his peers to see him reprimanded by the teacher for talking rather than getting help for not understanding (even though he doesn’t like getting in trouble). He sometimes talks back, but is easily redirected by his teacher. His parents are very supportive and do not have any unrealistic expectations for his achievement. They are concerned about his progress and success in school. They witness his confusion and questions concerning assignments when the unfinished work comes home for homework. They do not understand why he will not ask the teacher for assistance. After his mother discusses the matter with his teacher at Meet the Teacher Night, Keith comes to school the next morning and asks for assistance on a particular assignment. He seems obviously embarrassed that he has to ask for help, even though he then is able to complete the assignment in a timely matter that day and join his friends for recess. The next day, Keith again has to stay in and has homework to take home that evening.

Keith received a satisfactory Progress Report about five weeks into the school year. After that and until report cards were issued in early November, Keith’s grades took a nose-dive. He started accumulating a large number of missing assignments and was more unorganized than ever. He received a C, three C minuses, and a D plus for his first card marking grades, which were much lower than from his Progress Report. He started getting into more trouble for negative behaviors and breaking school rules. He was rumored to spending a lot of time with an older student that was generally involved in all sorts of mischief and deceitful behavior.

If Keith continues to refuse the teacher’s assistance and make bad choices in friends and behavior, he will continue to struggle throughout the rest of the school year. Unless he allows himself to be helped by those willing to do so (i.e. his teacher and peers), Keith may not have satisfactory grades and behavior to advance to the fifth grade.
Motivational Assessment

Keith’s main motivational problem appears to be centered on his image. As long as Keith is motivated to complete an activity and he feels that his confident image will be upheld in the eyes of his peers, then Keith will ask for help from the teacher and complete the task in a timely manner. Keith requires a comfortable classroom environment where he is allowed to receive positive feedback and assistance in a “low-key” manner from his teacher. Keith needs to remain organized (i.e. placing assignments in folder when finished, taking home books for homework each night). He still seems very willing to please both the teacher and his parents (for the time being), which is a method of motivation that can be utilized quite effectively in this instance.

Analysis

- What preconditions were met?

  The classroom is set up to be a nurturing, cooperative learning community. The teacher has established goals and methods that allow for students to feel comfortable questioning, receiving help, and completing assignments to the best of their abilities. The teacher makes every effort to maintain an organized environment, where students can anticipate and respond effectively to change.

- What evidence of behavioral, intrinsic motivation, and/or cognitive approaches to motivate learners did you see?

  The classroom utilizes a form of “token economy” through use of tickets. Two different tickets are possible: 1. Classroom ticket for Friday Drawing awarded for following rules, returning signatures on important paper in a timely manner, filling out assignment books, 100% completion of work, etc.; 2. Star Cart Tickets for following rules, good test grades, good work habits, etc. The teacher allows student interests and
experiences to shine in the form of projects such as book reports, biographies, and research papers. A rubric is used and guidelines for format are established, but the students are responsible for making personal choices on subject and presentation.


Task
1. How are tasks structured to optimally challenge students at appropriate skill levels?
2. Are tasks presented in ways to connect with students’ interests and experiences?
3. Are the purposes of learning activities clearly explained?
   - Connected to instructional goals
   - Connected to future learning opportunities (thus emphasizing progression of ideas)
4. Are students working on a variety of tasks, thus minimizing comparison across students?

Most tasks in the classroom are structured to optimally challenge students at appropriate skill levels. In Language and Reading, students are able to minimally complete tasks (showing lower skill levels), or expand upon and thus show higher levels. The teacher attempts to present activities and lessons that are connected to students’ interest and experiences, but most activities or assignments usually are given in an attempt to analyze students’ competencies according to Michigan’s Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) and thus are derived from a “pacing” system that requires certain tasks to be completed and assessed in a specific manner that equalizes conditions for all fourth grade students within this particular district. Although some activities allow for “teacher touches” and personalization, the majority must stay the same and are sometimes not very appealing to the students. Because of the GLCE “pacing” format, the teacher does clearly explain the purposes of activities and all students are made aware of instructional goals and future learning opportunities. The students know what is being taught, why it is being taught, and how it will relate to future lessons.
A(uthority)
1. Are students provided choices regarding topics, format, and other assignment features?
2. Is student input incorporated into classroom learning activities?
   - Acknowledging students’ insights into the topic
   - Encouraging students to pursue their unique interests while still providing structure

The majority of lessons in the classroom do not provide authority for the students to make choices. Again most lessons are structured under the district’s “paced” curriculum and so the teacher presents required lessons. She does, however, provide additional activities that allow students choices. Reading and Writing are the subjects where this is most evident. Students are able to complete various “response activities” for required literature. For example, they may complete a poem or write a newspaper article to show their comprehension of the story in addition to just completing the required multiple-choice Selection Comprehension Test at the end of each story. They are also given “freedom” within Writing as long as they meet the objectives and goals of the lessons. Students are offered some opportunities to make essential choices during large projects, such as Book Reports, Biography/Research, and Narrative Presentations. This allows for the students to focus on subjects that interest them and to share their interests with the teacher and peers.

R(ecognition)
1. Are students recognized publicly or privately for their individual achievements?
2. Is recognition provided only to those students who perform the best normatively or are students recognized for improvement, effort, and persistence (i.e., traditional honor rolls and displays of the “best papers”)?

Students are recognized publically and privately for individual achievements. Honor Roll and “best paper”-type displays are utilized by the teacher, but students are also recognized privately. They are able to select personal works to add to their Student Portfolios (which are private). They are also able to earn rewards (tickets for Friday Drawing) for having no missing
assignments or timely completion of certain projects (regardless of their letter grades awarded). The teacher tries not to publically compare student achievement. Graded papers are delivered by the teacher to the students’ personal mailboxes to ensure privacy. If papers are exchanged and checked, the teacher collects the papers and records the scores, she does not ask for them out loud.

**Grouping**

1. Is grouping structured in ways that encourage cooperation rather than competition?
2. Are group assignments varied so as to allow students to work together based on common interests rather than achievement level?
3. Does the classroom function as a collaborative learning community, with students working together with the teacher toward shared learning goals?

At the beginning of the school year, students were arranged in “pods” or groups of four students facing on another. The “pod” system is commonly used school-wide as an opportunity to establish learning communities. Students are placed in pods in a manner that uses ability level to create diversity within the pods. High, middle, and low students are intermingled so they may help one another as much as possible. Functionality is the most major focus of the pods, though. Students only remain in pods that can get along. The teacher does not force individuals to work together that don’t “mesh” well with one another.

The “pod” system had to be dismantled in the classroom approximately one month into the school year because of “over-socializing”. The “pods” were no longer successful as learning communities, they were just social arenas. So the desks are arranged in rows, with a large row down the center of the room with all the desks facing inward toward the middle teaching area. The students are seated in a “boy-girl-boy-girl” pattern, but they are also staggered by ability so students can still assist neighbors when possible.
**E(valuation)**

1. Are students allowed (and encouraged) to redo assignments for improved learning?
2. Are students given multiple opportunities to display what they know?
3. Does learning on a particular topic seem to stop at the point of assessment?
   - Is material revisited (individually, small group, or whole class) when it becomes apparent that it was not learned well the first time around?
4. Are evaluation formats varied in a way that allows students to best show what they know?

Students are given the opportunity to redo assignments if they are completely “off the mark” on what they should be learning. Mostly, the teacher will evaluate if the whole class needs review and will allow the class to redo a lesson together. Students are allowed to display their knowledge in multiple ways. In Reading for example, the students complete traditional work (Practice Book pages, short answer comprehension questions), Response Activities, Comprehension Tests, and whole and small group discussion concerning the text. The students are assessed on all of these activities to give a variety of different opportunities in case they don’t respond well (or show thorough understanding) through a certain task. As mentioned before, GLCE “pacing” dictates that learning and teaching are scaffolded activities. The students revisit previous lessons and concepts and are aware of how a topic will relate to later topics.

**T(ime)**

1. Are students given additional time when needed in order to maximize learning opportunities?
2. Is time used in flexible ways that allows teachers to structure learning activities that allow for deeper understanding and engagement, yet would otherwise not fit into typical 30-60 minute time blocks?

The teacher is very flexible with time restrictions on assignments. If a student shows a true need for an extension (not merely because their favorite show was on the previous night keeping them from homework), then they are allowed enough time to truly demonstrate their understanding. Although class schedules are not quite as flexible as hoped because of required curriculum on the
“pacing” schedule, the teacher tries to structure the class to allow for the most time to complete the tasks that will require the most time and attention. If Reading, Language, Writing, or Math will need additional concentration time to help the class, then additional time will be found in some way. The teacher tries to structure the work day by grouping similar subjects to follow one another to help students grasp their connections (for example: Spelling, Grammar, Reading and Writing are all taught in a 90 to 120 minute block in the morning and Math, Science and Social Studies are grouped in the afternoon).

**Proposed Motivational Intervention**

Since Keith’s main motivational problem appears to be centered on his image, I need to focus on strategies that will allow him to still feel “cool” while receiving help. It is essential that I focus on keeping the classroom environment comfortable, structured, and nurturing so Keith sees his peers’ comfort in asking and receiving help. He will still need to receive some assistance in a “low-key” manner, but my ultimate goal is to have Keith feel comfortable asking for help whenever he needs it, not just in private. Keith may also need some extra behavioral motivators, such as rewards, in order to keep him motivated to stay out of trouble and keep organized. According to Deborah Stipek, “Teachers usually find that the promise of a reward or threat of punishment can affect most children’s behavior in the classroom.” Keith will be placed on a “daily check” to help with organization. I know that as long as Keith is motivated to complete an activity and he feels that his confident image will be upheld in the eyes of his peers, then Keith will ask for help, complete required classroom tasks, and behave.

**T(ask):**
Tasks will still remain structured to optimally challenge students on a variety of levels when applicable. I will continue to monitor Keith and the type of assignments that are completed with little interference. This will indicate which type of assignment Keith prefers to do and I will attempt to integrate this into my instruction to the best of my ability.

**Authority:**
Again, because of restrictions within the GLCE “pacing”, the majority of lessons in the classroom do not provide authority for the students to make choices. I will still attempt at every opportunity to allow some choice in assignments. As mentioned above, Keith will continue to be monitored to see which assignment choices seem the most successful and enjoyable for him. These choices then will be made available to him when applicable, such as in projects, Response Activities, and research projects.

**R(ecognition):**
Students will still be recognized publically and privately for individual achievements. Honor Roll and “best paper”-type displays will still be utilized, but Keith (and some other students in similar motivational situations) will also be recognized more privately. I will establish a private reward system only known by myself and Keith for successful completion of tasks and behavior. I will still continue to utilize the Star Cart Tickets and Friday Drawing Tickets, but Keith will
have the opportunity to earn them at a more accelerated rate. He can receive a ticket for each completed assignment instead of a week’s worth, and so on. Keith will meet with me privately to select personal works to add to his Student Portfolio (which will be kept private and only used for conferences). I will still not publically compare student achievement and will personally deliver graded papers to the students’ personal mailboxes to ensure privacy. If papers are exchanged and checked, I will collect the papers and record the scores, this will help with Keith’s issues with too much public attention.

**G(rouping):**

The “pods” will still remain dismantled and the rows will be kept. This seems to have been somewhat successful for Keith because it keeps him from having too much of an “audience” to entertain instead of work like he did in the “pod”. It will also offer him so space to work where he will not think that his “pod” members are watching his progress or lack thereof. Although the students are not in “pods”, I will still attempt to keep the classroom functioning as a collaborative learning community by allowing small group and partner work. Keith usually makes good choices when choosing partners, and as long as he continues to choose to work with good partners, I will still allow him to opportunity to choose.

**E(valuation):**

Students will still be given the opportunity to redo assignments if they are completely “off the mark” on what they should be learning. Keith will be closely monitored and if he seems to not be “getting” it, then I will allow him as much time as needed to complete the assignment, as long as he continues to put forth the effort. Students, including Keith, are still allowed to display their knowledge in multiple ways such as traditional work, Response Activities, Comprehension
Tests, whole and small group discussion, and projects. This will allow Keith the opportunity to excel in whichever way is best suited for him. As mentioned before, GLCE “pacing” dictates that learning and teaching are scaffolded activities. Keith and the rest of the students will continue to revisit previous lessons and concepts to remain aware of how a topic relates to later topics we will encounter.

_T(time):_
I will remain very flexible with time restrictions on assignments. If Keith or any other student shows a true need for an extension, then they will be given enough time to truly demonstrate their understanding. I will still continue to structure the work day by grouping similar subjects to follow one another to help students grasp the connection between the subjects (for example: Spelling, Grammar, Reading and Writing are all taught in a 90 to 120 minute block in the morning and Math, Science and Social Studies are grouped in the afternoon). This will be especially useful in keeping Keith structured and organized. If he can anticipate what is coming and what will be worked on, he will be more likely to complete the assignment.

**Conclusion**
If these strategies are employed and the teacher remains structured and dedicated to the intervention, Keith should continue gaining confidence in the classroom. He will continue to resist a bit at first, but if he continues to see that the classroom is an inviting and nurturing learning community, then he will begin to feel like a valid contributor instead of a “cool” kid with an image to uphold. Hopefully, Keith can channel that need to be accepted into a want to be the role model of a good student for his peers.
References
