

Milos Havel is one of three seventh-grade teachers at a middle school in a small but ethnically diverse city. The three seventh-grade teachers cover reading and social studies in their own “homeroom” classes, but each one instructs all seventh graders in one subject area (math, English, or science). Mr. Havel’s specialty is English.

Mr. Havel is worried about Jamie, a student in his homeroom class. Jamie appears to be a very bright child when he applies himself. He readily participates in class by explaining difficult concepts and providing good examples of the material, particularly during his favorite subject, social studies. His difficulties appear to be in the sixth-period mathematics class. Although Gladys DeBrick does not complain about Jamie’s compliance in her class, his academic performance is weak. He rarely finishes his homework on time and appears to have fallen behind in the subject. For example, he lacks an understanding of basic mathematical principles taught the previous year in sixth grade.

During their weekly Thursday morning meeting, the three seventh-grade teachers discuss their students’ performance. It turns out that Ms. DeBrick’s student Jasmine is having problems completing her English assignments for Mr. Havel’s sixth period. Much like Jamie, Jasmine does not have many behavioral problems within the classroom, nor does she appear to struggle with the content of Mr. Havel’s English class.

Mr. Havel and Ms. DeBrick develop a plan. Mr. Havel will help Jamie with his math homework during the study hall period immediately following Jamie’s sixth-period math class. In turn, Ms. DeBrick will help Jasmine with her English homework during the study hall period immediately following Jasmine’s sixth-period English class. Although both need to attend to other students during the study hall period, Mr. Havel and Ms. DeBrick will try to give Jamie and Jasmine as much extra help with homework as possible.

Several issues arise while trying to implement this plan with Jamie. On the first day, Mr. Havel walks by Jamie’s desk and states, “I will be around to help you with your mathematics homework, so take out the assignment and get started.”

Jamie replies, “I thought we could talk about the social studies lesson you gave today, like we usually do.”

“No, I think your time is much better spent completing your math homework while you are here and have my help available to you,” says Mr. Havel.

“I don’t think I have the worksheets Ms. DeBrick gave us to complete. I guess I will have to do them tomorrow. So we can discuss social studies, right?” asks Jamie.

This pattern of forgetting the homework assignment and diverting the conversation to social studies continues for several days. Finally, Mr. Havel tells Jamie that he will not discuss social studies with him during study hall until his math homework is complete. After only one day of Mr. Havel’s refusing to talk with him about social studies, Jamie begins to bring his math homework. Although he struggles with completing the problems, he puts forth effort to complete the assignments so he will have a few extra minutes at the end of the class study hall period to discuss social studies with Mr. Havel.

In Ms. DeBrick’s homeroom, the plan works wonderfully from the start. Jasmine seems to enjoy the extra attention she receives in completing her English assignments. Ms. DeBrick notices that Jasmine

does not seem to have difficulty completing the work once she has given Jasmine an example or two to get her started. Ms. DeBrick decides to pair Jasmine with a student who excels in English so that Ms. DeBrick is able to spend her time helping the other children and preparing her lessons for the next day.