

Appendix 3
Major Paper 2

Dear, [Redacted],

As a volunteer for the afterschool program offered at your organization, I have been exposed to many new experiences in terms of how to communicate with young students and help them academically. I have also noticed how the administration has done a good job in attending the students' academic needs as well as providing a community-based service program that is well acquainted with the students who are mostly from immigrant families. Your administration has conducted well thought-out and impressive lesson plans for the students that range from the age of 7 to 12 years old to follow throughout their three-hour afterschool session. Having been a volunteer at the 1st and 2nd grade classroom for a little over two months at this organization, I have been given the opportunity to connect with these young students and monitor their academic progress as well as their wellbeing. I have also had the chance to carry out a research on the students' literacy and bilingualism with other volunteers in order to find out more about how their literacy affects them socially and academically.

One of my responsibilities as a volunteer for this program is to ensure that their school homework is completed and also assist them in doing so. Based on my encounters with these students during homework time, I have noticed various behaviors and characters projected by these students whenever it is time to do homework. In my classroom, the classroom coordinator will give a total of 30 to 40 minutes for homework time with breaks for readings or playtime in between. If a student does not have homework for that day, he or she can choose from the many worksheets that are prepared by the coordinator. Since the coordinator always puts up the chronological time plan for the day, students will usually notice and acknowledge when homework time is due. Some students will not hesitate to take out their homework and quickly work on it, and some students will only work on their homework when asked. However, there are also students who, more often than not, will deny having any homework, and there are also those who refuse to do their homework even when asked or given some little reward such as extra free time.

I believe that your administration has given sufficient attention and effective academic plans for these students in this very helpful community-based service environment but I would like to suggest one interactive way to help tackle the struggle students might have in completing their homework alongside encouraging them to do their homework without seeing it as a burden. I would like to suggest for each classroom to have the "Star Points" reward system which would motivate students to complete their homework and engage in a healthy competition between their peers. As a clarification, I do not wish to condone any negative competition or to put any struggling students down but my intention is to ensure that these students would feel like doing homework and worksheets is fun and not just writing words and numbers on paper. I propose that coordinators give equal number of star points to students who work on their homework and every other two weeks, the student with the most star point will receive a reward such as a big packet of candies or snacks. If each student accumulate the same number of star points, then everybody would receive a packet of candies, snacks or perhaps other small tokens every month. If the coordinator wishes to make it a merrier occasion, the coordinator and the volunteers can hold a small celebration for everyone at the last 10 minutes of class during the last week of the month and might also add a certificate of achievement for these students.

One of the main reasons I believe this simple yet effective reward system is important is because of the fact that most of the students at this organization are from immigrant families and so they are also bilingual. Based on the study my peers and I carried out on literacy communication of these young students at this organization not too long ago, it is found that they mostly only speak Chinese (Cantonese and/or Mandarin) at home. Having bilingualism is important for cultural respect and it also provides important communication skills for these young students in the long run. Nevertheless, this causes a barrier of communication between the students and their parents on their academic needs. This can clearly

be seen when some of the students who receive letters from school would ask for help from coordinators or volunteers to explain what the letters mean so that they could do the same to their parents at home. Some of them also claim that they do not do homework at home. Therefore, I believe it is imperative to reinforce the importance of completing their homework at the afterschool program where there are English-speaking coordinators and volunteers present to aid them.

Another reason as to why I believe this system could work in encouraging students to do their homework is because celebration of the smallest behavior or achievements can motivate them. Research shows that children's positive behaviors are motivated by external factors such as receiving rewards or having somebody acknowledging their positive behavior (Leimgruber et al. 6). Instead of just celebrating and acknowledging their efforts, it is also vital that the class coordinators and volunteers always remind the students of the importance and benefits of practicing what they learn at school and teach them the sense of responsibility. This is so that these students learn the benefits of studying and not confuse this with just making rewards the only goal of doing homework. Besides that, this simple reward system will not be costly and is up to each class coordinator on how to hold a small celebration of good behaviors and efforts done on homework and worksheets. This culture of not only verbally acknowledging their work but also presenting them tokens of appreciation can further motivate these young students while also making the communication between the students and the coordinators and volunteers more interactive and different. However, the communication of these students with their parents at home also contribute as a factor as to why I think it is important that these students need to be positively reinforced in order to focus on their academics at this organization.

Since the afterschool program is a program that has classrooms full of students, peers also play a big part in these young students' academic development besides the coordinators and volunteers. From my observation, peers often heavily influence the decisions that these students make. For instance, if a student decides to stop doing homework and starts doing other things instead, his or her friends would usually ask them what they're doing and join them. They also tend to agree with any invitation from their friends or help them when asked. This vulnerable behavior shows how these students can be susceptible to their friends' achievements and that they would most probably want to gain the same results that their friends achieved. Brandt mentions how sponsors are any abstract or concrete agencies who provide incentives and steer the way for these students to gain literacy (Brandt 166-167). Consequently, peers fit the description of a literacy sponsor so well because they are the motivational trigger for these students in achieving academic literacy by setting exemplary behaviors that these students tend to want to copy. Thus, by using this simple reinforcement "star points" method, I believe students would be more encouraged to work on their homework by following the course steered by their friends' achievements.

In conclusion, I hope the administration of CISC would consider my proposal to establish this reinforcement design system that would not only help to incorporate a sense of responsibility and motivation for these students to work on their academic development but also encourage them to be at their best behavior. Apart from that, this financially affordable system also invites a culture of celebration and appreciation that could also drive and push these students in working hard for them to achieve success in the long run.

Best,

Banana

Volunteer, [Redacted]

Works Cited

Leimgruber, Kristin L., et al. "Young Children Are More Generous When Others Are Aware Of Their Actions." *Plos ONE* 7.10 (2012): 1-8. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 25 May 2015

Brandt, Deborah. "Sponsors of Literacy." (1998): 165-173. Document.