

*The following is an outline of a WhyTry pilot program that was implemented by two local high school counselors. While there is no “right” way to teach a WhyTry class -- and you will want to adjust your own teaching model to the specific needs of your group -- this structure worked well in the target group, bringing about real, measurable change.*

### **Who took the class?**

The initial approach was to identify students in their freshman year that were most at risk of dropping out of school. These students showed a pattern of failing all or most of their classes, and were almost entirely disengaged with school. They were contacted over the summer or at the beginning of the year and invited to attend the WhyTry class. Over 95% of the students contacted agreed to attend.

The parents of each student that accepted the invitation were contacted and made aware of the class. Parent response was extremely positive, and all the parents expressed gratitude that the school was taking such an active interest in helping their son or daughter.

After teaching the class for a semester with only the students at risk for failure, students that expressed an interest in counseling as a future career were interviewed and invited to attend as peer mentors. The ratio was about two to three student mentors to about 12 to 14 at-risk students. Once the class began, they were never referred to as helpers or mentors, but simply became members of the class. Introducing these mentors to the class made a huge difference in attitudes and group behavior. The at-risk students fed off the positive examples of the helpers.

### **What was the curriculum?**

The curriculum was a combination of approved study skills curriculum already being taught in the district together with the WhyTry Program. Other outside materials were also incorporated, including “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers” by Sean Covey, which was used as the textbook for the class. (The WhyTry student journals may also be used as the class textbook.)

This was a powerful combination that taught the youth how to improve their learning and study skills, as well as how to stay motivated and put real effort into life.

### **Who teaches the class?**

The study skills portion of the class was taught by an English teacher trained in that curriculum. The WhyTry material was primarily taught by one or two school counselors.



## How was the class structured?

The class was structured so that the curricula alternated every other class period, teaching study skills one class period, then teaching WhyTry materials the next.

### *Class text: "7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens"*

All students were required to read the book. One or two students were assigned to present on each chapter. (They were expected to become experts on the subject covered in that chapter.)

### *Study Skills Curriculum*

While an approved study skills curriculum was taught alongside the WhyTry class, WhyTry facilitators could use WhyTry to complement any approved curriculum already in use, such as teen living, health, life skills or career curricula. This portion was taught by the study skills teacher, coordinating with the counselors to incorporate and reinforce the WhyTry principles in the study skills lessons. Students were taught out of "7 Habits" and gave presentations on the text during this portion of the class.

### *WhyTry Materials*

We suggest that you teach the "Reality Ride" chapter first as an introduction to the program and then the "Motivation Formula." After that, you can simply follow the order of the program teaching each analogy.

On days when WhyTry materials were used, the lesson would usually begin by introducing the visual analogy. Then they would play music and engage the students in a learning activity.

They would also mix other activities into their WhyTry teaching periods such as "Passion, purpose, or interest" presentations done by students (see "Keys to Motivation" below) as well as conducting one-on-one interviews, setting goals, and planning for a service project with the youth.

## What was the student-teacher relationship like?

The relationship that you develop with your class is the key to your success in motivating your students. Without positive relationships, the WhyTry Program would never succeed.

- Teachers gave students updates on their progress at least once a week or every other week.
- Teachers interviewed each student at the beginning and end of the term to set goals, and gave them the opportunity to commit to the "No 'F' Game Plan." (See next page for details.)
- At one time during the term, a teacher tried to reach the youth at home with a phone call or post-card with some positive feedback on their progress.
- At least once a term, teachers talked with parents to tell them how much their son or daughter was improving and how much they appreciated them being in their class. (Only focus on positive behaviors.)
- Look for opportunities to acknowledge the students outside of class (in the hall, at games, at dances, etc.). Take the opportunity to recognize the success of students in front of other students in the class. (This can be anything positive or praiseworthy - extracurricular activities, sports, drama, music, grades, etc.)





## Additional Activities

### *Keys to Motivation*

At some point during the semester, each student is asked to do a presentation to the class about something that they are passionate about. This activity is tied to the part of the Motivation Formula that highlights the need for a “passion, purpose, or interest” to keep yourself motivated (i.e. skateboarding, dancing, artwork, or music). Students are to share their passion with the other kids.

Note: This was a powerful tool to help the kids feel that everyone was interested in who they are.

### *Service Project*

To help reinforce the “turning outward” principle in the Motivation Formula, plan a class service project. This proved to be very helpful in allowing the student mentors and counselors to get closer to the students as they worked together in an environment outside of school. It helped students feel better about themselves and increased their self-esteem.

Note: In this particular case study, the students volunteered for the Forest Service. The Forest Service was so impressed with their efforts that they submitted the class for a national service recognition award.

### *Former Student Presentation*

Once you have taught the class for a couple of semesters, it can be very effective to have a former student come in and share their experiences with the class: where they were before and after taking the WhyTry class, and their success and growth since.

### *Incentives*

As a reward for the students’ improvement, the teachers decided to hold a banquet at a local restaurant and formally recognize the accomplishments of the students throughout the semester. When the restaurant -- Macaroni Grill -- heard about what the teachers were doing, they generously offered to sponsor the banquet.

## Class Schedule

We suggest that the teacher and counselor work together to create a calendar for the class, determining when they would be teaching each analogy and when they would participate in their community service project or other extracurricular activities. This is key in ensuring that both teachers are working together to teach and reinforce each analogy as they progress throughout the semester.

*Typical Schedule (taught in a school that follows an A/B block schedule with four 90-minute periods a day, rotating every other day):*

Monday: Study skills

Wednesday: WhyTry - Introduce the visual

Friday: Study skills - Youth present their “passion”

Next week:

Tuesday: WhyTry - Learning activity (Reality Ride), review the visual, process the activity

Thursday: Study skills

## The No “F” Game Plan

The No “F” Game Plan is a simple written contract that you make with a student. This contract requires them to do three things that will assure that they will pass all of their classes.

The student commits to:

- **Attend every class**
- **Sit on the front row if possible, giving the teacher their undivided attention.**

They must act interested, even if they don’t understand what the teacher is saying or they are not interested in the subject. This is the key for the student to reach out and connect with the teacher. If the teacher is aware of them putting forth an effort and showing them respect, that teacher will be more likely to give them the help that they need to pass the class.

- **They must do all of the homework for the class.**

If the student is consistently doing all of the above and still failing, you as their WhyTry advocate commit to personally speak with their teacher. After teaching hundreds of students, our counselors report that they have only needed to do this a handful of times.