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THE INSTITUTION

Unlike many of my peers, I engaged in service to Foothills Charter School, which is held in the CCHS building in the evenings from 5-9 Monday through Friday. This charter school uses a similar curriculum to many in Georgia by following the standards provided for each subject and grade level; however, the structure of the curricula, the classroom set up, its environment, and the aggregate of implications on the school is vast. 99 percent of classwork is completed in an online format through a MOODLE platform service that keeps track of all the students, their progress, and many other statistical datasets on everyone. This program allows students to complete their work at their own pace, to not need a traditional classroom, and to graduate. These are the positives of the program design; however, I think that the lack of interpersonal relationships between peers, instructor, and texts leads to numerous functional behavioral issues. Over my time at Foothills, most individuals I worked with expressed themselves in such fashion to bring me to the conclusion that the behaviors of the students could perhaps be improved with more interaction. Similarly, the pace of the program is completely up to the student; mentors are available to speak with, but there is no sense of "drive" to complete work except from the internalized mechanism of the student's mind. Students are expected to work diligently, in proverbial silence until a question arises. This program benefits students with their own internal motivation, an ability to self-teach, good note-takers, or those that are a few credits shy of graduation. Life has other ideas though, and students at Foothills are from diverse environments and socioeconomic strata: some students work full-time, some are over twenty, some lack motivation, some have their own families, some are pregnant, some are on probation, some are

graduating early, some are battling cancer, some are dual enrolled, and still there are more scenarios. Infinite possibilities for why a student attends Foothills, but fewer outcomes. Students either graduate, or they drop out: the mediators are far too involved for anything else.

My high schools differed greatly from Foothills from the design of the curricula to the classroom setup. At Grayson and Loganville High, the classrooms had individual desks arranged in neat rows facing the whiteboard, textbooks under the seat, a dust-laden projector, and an irate orator brimming with knowledge; Foothills is set up with long tables along each wall with computers and media devices for learning. The center of each room is more individualized, depending on what subject is held there earlier in the day by CCHS. Classic City High School uses the same space, so the layout of the room is not up for change under any circumstances. The administration of Foothills must cooperate and maintain a good relationship with CCHS because they are housed in the same facility. Foothills needs its own facility to thoroughly impact students' academic careers, which remains obvious to all who attend, but unfortunately unlikely. The disconnect between space and its function helps students to share, however, their collective morale is negatively impacted by this.

Initially I came with an open mind, and a ready "heart"; this changed momentarily, as I was turned away the first time I came to tutor [that's what they call us b/c paid Mentor position exists] because the proper paperwork had not been received from Mrs. Mimi. Thankfully, I came back the next week and immediately was welcomed and allowed to enter after getting a once over from the super imposing police officer that stands guard. The structure of the institution is very concerned with security and safety, which I learned rather quickly. The looseness of location, time, etc. positively impacts the security of the school: it does this through well planned response initiatives to different scenarios, and training on these issues.

Technology in the classroom as the main mode of interaction imprinted me with a negative impression overall. Students did not use a secure lock browser, so they were often sneaking a google search or two. Similarly, most I worked with had little attention span or focus, and

kinesthetic materials allowed them to focus for significantly longer: I printed out readings, assessments, etc. Two students I worked with were at an advantage with the online program because they had one or two credits left to graduate, which is four-six weeks of attending two days a week, or three weeks of intense study. Both students chose the former, and hopefully will be graduating on May 28th. These students in a way display the principles set forth in Queer South Rising, in their diversity and acceptance; this may seem strange, but I went into the situation without purposeful bias, and kept an open mind. I did not assume their orientation, gender, etc.

THE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

My interactions with the administrators was rather limited; I spent most of my time in the English Class with Mrs. Mullens. Two administrators would enter throughout the course of the night to check on class management and see if the facilitator needed anything; however, other than that, it was Mrs. Mullens and I on Tuesdays from 6-9. Two other tutors were there occasionally, however, I do not know the specific dates.

Mrs. Mullens utilizes a combination of technology, interpersonal communication, one-on-one conferencing, and direct instruction to help the students. She often would be rotating through the missed questions on a post-test with a student, when another student needed her immediately. The human capital of the facilitator is sparse, and the facility needs more. I would recommend a lead instructor, and two assists or co-teachers with volunteer tutors to supplement. If you are going to have an online program at a school so students have direct access to help, then you should supply them with it. Of course, this may only be true when the direct relation of funds is more than the need of the students [I need to brush up on my econ].

I did not serve in the role of graduation coach or personal mentor, but more in a tutoring/teacher assistant function. I always encouraged the students I worked with to do their

best, and to give their all, but also to enjoy their life to the fullest without doing anything illegal. However, this was more of a personal mantra with them, not a coaching technique.

Most of the administrators and other key personnel at Foothills seem incognito; they have little interaction with the tutors and other volunteers at the school. One of the directors, Mrs. Poesy, did not know my name until the last day that I was there, when by happenstance our paths crossed on the way to the front door. She introduced herself briefly and then no more was said. I felt like I was imaginary, and of little consequence, but reality of her station shows that I am of little import, as I am temporary in the function of the school, whereas its success lies on her shoulders.

THE STUDENTS

I worked with almost every student in the English room at some point in the semester. To show completeness of each student interaction, I will have to break down everyone into categorical terms and speak on our shared experience.

Personality: Students that I worked with were on a range of very outgoing to completely introverted.

M's personality is what I call country frat bro stereo: it makes one think of porches, beer pong, country music, a fish-hook in a ball cap, camouflage everything, loudness, slow-talking, partying, alcohol poisoning and sports. He loves these things, but has an addendum of a full-time job with his dad, running the family business. He is hard working and diligent, but lacks focus and motivation; he likes things with instant gratification, like building a porch, or anything that gifts one with that positive vibe. We have similar interests and life-situations, with our main connection being working full-time and going to school. My personality in my professional life is both honest and aloof. I try to work a balance between the two, and he was cool on that level: we focused on him and his situations.

A's personality is bold and bright with a slash of ruthlessness that can make your skin crawl. She's brutally honest, and speaks her mind with ease, rather telling the truth than some pretty lie to make someone feel good. She's a young mom, with an adorable 18-month-old son that she adores. She's kind and considerate to those in authority positions, and mutually respectful of her peers. We got along swimmingly and progressed rather quickly through her 12th grade part B English course. B denotes that it is the second semester English and she will be graduating if she finishes in the next two weeks.

Cultural Background:

Student M comes from a blue collar working family, on the lower end of the just above poverty level. He is a young white male, cisgender, heterosexual. These factors contribute to the way he views and behaves in several ways. He spoke of how he would be among the first in his family to complete high school, and that is a main reason he cares about school, but only enough to get by. His father in particular is a huge influence on him and shaped his own ideologies to match his father's. School is of little value, and the intellectual side of him is thirsting for nourishment, or so I believe. Conversely, my family values were of poor farmers turned rich (middle class lol), who quickly became poor again. My biological mother was the first to graduate in my family from high school, whereas my biological father's family valued a diploma. My Nanny, my great-grandmother, helped raise me as a child, and she did not make it past sixth grade. She fully focused on my education, going without so I would have a chance. It's hard to think that people do not care about intellect or education, but seemingly the mantra "Ignorance is Bliss" holds true for many individuals in educational facilities.

A is a black female, cisgender, and a teen mom. I know nothing of her background besides these things. However, even this information contributes to the way she views the world. A is nice and funny when you get to know her, but when she is first getting acquainted she is standoffish and slyly

protective. Her viewpoint is completely different from mine because she is different according to the labels that people ascribe to one another, or their self. I will not even begin to say that I can imagine what it is like to be anything other than white in the Deep South, Male, and affluent in social standing. Her Cultural Capital is more than mine, in my opinion, because she brings so much more perspective to the table.

Educational Experiences: M did not share much of his learning experiences with me, but we did create many. He flourished on multiple-choice questions on comprehension and statistical numbers. His ability seems to be high, slightly lowered by his ADHD. He enjoys math, and computes complex equations with ease, but when it's time for reading, he grudgingly acquiesces. M does not think that the FAPE education required from schools is enough, and that the schools often fail students that do not fit the stereotypes for student personalities and learning style. He would much rather be working and accomplishing something instantly, but he is finishing school so he may earn a technical degree which requires a High School Diploma. He's working on understanding his style of learning and comprehension regarding literacy, but he struggles with fully reading a piece, skimming it instead. In part, I think that this is directly related to his ADHD and worked on strategies to bring him back to focus. We both experience ADHD in an analogous manner, which helped in the classroom to allow him to focus on things in a cyclical manner. For me, when I do things in rounds, work on A, B, C repeatedly for 5 minutes, I'm able to focus and critically analyze the material better than if I'm staring at the same thing for 20 minutes. Through this technique, he could complete assignments in a more efficient and manageable time frame by scaffolding the material into shorter task components. M needed little direction from a human instructor, but often asked for clarification on instructions provided by the online platform. M's behavior is wonderful 99% of the time; however, he is distracted by a certain female student that is vying for his attention.

A's experiences are entirely different from M's experiences. She is on the college prep track, loves History and English best and abhors all math. She mostly attributes this to her socialization in elementary school, where one educator said that girls were not supposed to be good at math because it is too hard for a girl. While socialized as delicate, A is anything but; she's a single mom that is finishing school so she can become a medical technician. Her ability to apply personal strengths to school shows through her dedication and determination to graduate this May. Her inspiration is her son, who she hopes to build a stable home for with socioeconomic benefits to reflect her work. She sees school as necessary to build a foundation for life, but expressed that more skills for life should be taught in schools. She is well mannered and speaks with an authoritative purpose that reflects in her school work; however, she does not take criticism on her work well, instead preferring a coaching style that is positive while correcting the mistakes. Our experiences are interestingly similar, but I had my nephews, and I had no family support in high school. I'm glad that her experience is different in that her family supports her and babysits while she works and finishes school at night.

YOU AS A MENTOR, TUTOR, AND FUTURE EDUCATOR

Reflect on your role as a mentor: I felt like I reached several of my students on both a personal and professional level. The students I worked with were at first sporadic in their attendance, but started coming every day I was there, for the full length of the session. Students would wait for Mrs. Mullens the first two or so weeks I was there, but after working with a few of them at Mrs. Mullens insistence to them, they asked for me to come help them. I felt like I connected with them because I was not on an authoritative level, and was closer to their ages. This helped me connect with them and give them strategies to be academically successful. One student stands out in that I entered the room and they would say, "I didn't think you were coming. I was gonna leave." Promptly she would pull up her work and get started, pulling me aside for help whenever needed. This student did not need help to find the answers, but to take

the time to read them and make sure she understood what they were asking. At these junctures, we would read the question aloud and then use non-academic language to paraphrase it. After this, she answered every question without fail. I think in her case, and others I made a positive impact by helping and sharing my own experiences rising from poverty.

Reflect on your role as a tutor: I feel as though both myself and the students made progress. I know that we broke barriers between diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, along with breaking the boundaries of our own personalities. The coexisting mentoring aspects worked well with the students. The more I learned about them and acknowledged them as individuals, the more they came to rely on my opinion and guidance in both personal matters and academic.

Reflect on your position as a future educator: I'm still committed to becoming an educator, and even more so now that I have worked with such a diverse group of students. I thought that I might not be able to reach students across the diverse spectrum from my own perspective and identity. I was wrong, and am glad to think forward again. I'm currently working on designing a token economy using the Harry Potter series as inspiration. I think that this system I'm working on will effectively eliminate the need for in school suspension and other behavioral reinforcements. The idea is that as each house gains points, their group gains favor and succeeds at having extra motivation (10 pts on a test, candy, etc) at certain levels of achievement. If they lose points, they will no longer have those things, and the individuals who were at fault would receive the scorn of their peers. An intervention stage would be utilized on a case-by-case basis to determine this. In general, I am prepared to become an educator, no matter the timeline. One thing that I think about is what I learned from Madness, a book my book club read this semester. If any students in my classroom have a mental illness, or struggle at all in any way related to their mental health, I would like to know so that I may be aware and help in whatever way possible to help them be academically successful. Similar to this is the last

book we read in which we explored diversity in education, aptly titled *Start Where You are, but Don't Stay There.* This book acknowledged students in every fashion possible and made me explicitly aware of the many backgrounds that students are coming from. This book showed that it is imperative that educators are aware of this but also take it to the next level by actively sharing their own culture with the students, so that they are being part of a cultural exchange. This to me is very important because without the dialogue and hard discussions, there is no forward movement, nor awareness of the many cultural differences that exist amongst all students.