

Brandi Jo Hafermalz

LLED3461

CCHS Experience

April 20, 2019

THE INSTITUTION

The structure and format of Classic City High School, CCHS as I will refer to it now, is like something I have never seen before. Also, the cafeteria was in a different building, which allowed a lot of kids to skip 3rd period after driving away during lunch. In my classroom, Mrs. Kaiser's 11th and 12th grade English, the tables were set up at different points in the room. Some square tables and some circular, but more chaotic than organized. There were some posters on the wall, mainly Mrs. Kaiser's class rules, and some typical animal with quote posters. The environment was not a productive learning environment at all. Kids either sat alone or in groups, often leaving people out. Many kids remained on their phones as there was no phone policy as I saw it until Mrs. Hamilton was forced to step in as the teacher due to unexpected events. This non-traditional format was not at all like anything I had experienced in high school. In my school's, desks sat in a row, there were no group tables, only individual desks and the only time we were allowed to move them was when we did group projects. I do think that it could be a productive environment if some kids were not left out and if the discussion was actually productive to the lesson at hand. I think the structure benefits students who don't really want to learn as they just spend the majority of the time talking, and harms the students who either want to learn, are struggling to learn, or are introverted. My initial reaction was that they were all just on their phones, no lessons were being taught. This was mainly due to the fact that they were having a different sub every day. This did not change until the teacher, Mrs. Kaiser, got back from her sick leave, and for two weeks I saw more structure to the class. They started with a mini-lesson, and then generally a video, a packet to instruct them on what to do and then a quiz. This had much more structure although I question the actual positive outcomes of this. However,

the teacher left once again and Mrs. Hamilton instead had to step in. This provided more structure in terms of cell phones as she was not scared to take them away, but classes mainly consist of a packet after packet. The technology was in no way useful to these students in my classroom. In fact, it inhibited their learning. 95% of the time they were on their phone and were not getting in trouble for not doing their work, that is until Mrs. Hamilton started taking them up, but even then class was filled with students arguing and trying to negotiate with Mrs. Hamilton how to get their phones back. The student body definitely participated in indirect bullying, much like I read about in my group's book *School Bullying*, edited by Peter Smith and Sonia Sharp. The book was slightly outdated so it did not think that indirect bullying was that prominent in schools, but I heard someone say something mean, or pass a rumor, about another kid not in the student body at least once every class. It was hard to combat that and stop it other than just saying, "be nice", or "bullying isn't okay". It was not an easy conversation to have with them as most of them said they were bullied at home, or by other kids, so they did not see the big deal. Towards the end of the year it dwindled down, or perhaps they just saved my ears from it. Either way I think it is a conversation that needs to be had at CCHS.

THE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Some of the best interactions I had with the faculty mainly included those subbing in for Ms. Kaiser as I only actually met her twice. Mrs. Davenport often filled in, although she always forgot who I was, but she was really nice and talked to me a lot about going into education and I voiced my concerns about not knowing the correct phone policy to have when I am a teacher. We often talked about that, as well as the importance of making sure kids feel loved. Another sub was a lady who had a kid who was on the Asperger's spectrum. For the life of me I cannot remember her name, but the conversations we had were very insightful as she told me how awesome the programs in this district are. I also learned that her son was able to associate some numbers with colors, much like Daniel Tammet, the author of *Born on a Blue Day*, was able to. I met her during the time we were reading that book, so I even told her a little about it and she told me she was going to order it. I sure hope she did because that book was amazing! We then also talked about the phone policy, where I learned hers was just let them have it, but I do not think I will take that same approach. Since, as I stated before, we never really had a consistent teacher in the classroom, no direct instruction was ever really made. In fact, thirty minutes of generally every class was spent looking for the lesson plans, which were hardly ever found as they are scattered everywhere and trying to get onto the laptop, which until Mrs. Hamilton came in was locked with passwords that no sub cared to ask for. Not a lot of technology was used when I was in there. I can only actually recall two times, one was a Salem witch trial fun fact video, and the other was James Baldwin's speech, "American Dream and American Negro". The later video was actually shown on my first day and sparked a very passionate and intense conversation which I will touch on later. I can tell that the students definitely respect Mrs. Hamilton more than

they do most teachers. The reason for this, I can only assume is because she treats them as adults.

She has rules and sticks to them which is respectable and also allows the kids to know what is expected of them. As a mentor, it proved to be trying. It was hard for me to find the correct balance between teacher and friend, as the students sometimes wanted to involve me in their antics (example: hiding Mrs. Hamilton's laptop when she left the room), but when I informed them what they were doing is wrong, or they needed to stop, or even told Mrs. Hamilton where her laptop was I got called a "no-fun tattler". I am not going to lie, I felt a little uncool for a second and then I realized, it's not about being "cool" it is about doing what is best for the students. In this case, it was the fact that we needed Mrs. Hamilton's laptop to pull up the lesson plans for the day. Later on, I realized that I really wanted the kids to find me cool and that was why I was so sad when they clearly didn't think that, but then I remembered when I am a teacher one day, that is what I am a teacher. At the end of class though the students were right back to joking with me and it was life it never happened. Although it is important to respect the students and show them that you are on their level, it is also important that they give that same respect to you and if they are not then something needs to be done about it. Finding a balance between being on the children's level as well as the children maintaining a level of respect for you is something I will have to delve more, as I get closer to becoming a teacher.

THE STUDENTS

I had an opportunity to work with some amazing kids while at CCHS. A couple in particular that

I want to talk about will be named as followed (real names changed for purpose of privacy):

Passion, Sass, and Chameleon. These 3 kids are the ones who I truly sparked relationships with and whom I felt like I really helped in one way or another.

Passion:

Wow! Where to begin. Passion had just that, passion. She immediately caught my attention on my first day when we watched a speech by James Baldwin, and after we watched it she stood up and gave a very passionate, intense speech about the mistreatment of blacks in America. She would say things like, “all white people are racist” and then turn to me and say. “But not you Mrs. Jo”. She informed me of time she was walking downtown when what she said, “white UGA frat guys” looked at her in a way that made her feel unsafe and as if she should get out of their path. She informed me then on my first day that she wants to be an activist, a lawyer, a teacher, and a president one day. I knew then that she was of high intelligence. She stood tall in herself and spoke loud even when the sub asked her to quit yelling and cussing. While I understand the issue of how she was behaving, it served as a template for me later on. When she was not passionate about doing work I was able to talk to her about her interests and passions which eventually motivated her to do her work. We discussed the ideas of racism and the correct way of talking about in, in which it would be effective for an audience of predominantly white to really receive the information. Passion was certainly a lot louder and more confident than me, but I truly did not mind. In fact I admire her demeanor and even gained confidence in myself through her. Passion was an African American, female, who I can only make assumptions about her

social class, but I will say she often came dressed in nice suits. Something about her gave her a really strong sense of self, whether it was how she was raised, or just how she developed as a person she certainly had at least one good role model. However, she does clearly hold some anger, for what I am not sure. She was not very open to talking about anything about her own personal self, which was sad for me as I did want to learn more. Passion like I said was very intelligent, but she would often complain about work and make speeches in front of the class about how the work was useless and it was just going to get lost anyway. To her credit though they were going through different subs every week and they were being given repeat work, so maybe she had a point in all of this. Also, Passion wanted to explore a more creative side that packets did not offer, but when it finally came to project time she was much more encouraging of her other classmates to finish their projects on time. She was definitely a leader of her 11th grade

English class. When she spoke people would listen, and if she didn't want to do something nobody was going to do it. She certainly has the ability to lead people in a positive light, perhaps she just needs a better setting than CCHS. She has a much better relationship with Mrs. Hamilton than she did with any of the subs. To me I think it comes down to stability and trust. Knowing that that person in your life is stable and if they say they will make sure something gets graded that you trust that it will. With the multiple subs these students lives at CCHS offered no stability, in fact even I was walking into every class never knowing what we were doing or who would be standing at the front (or sitting at the desk not talking to the kids as the subs often did).

Overall, passion has a lot to offer and her passion is never ending. I just hope she continues to have mentors who show her she is amazing.

Sass:

The next student I want to talk about will go by the name of Sass, because she exudes just that. Now don't get me wrong I love it and in no way do I find this to be a negative personality type.

She has to be one of the funniest people I have ever met. Sass was African American and I believe a Christian. We talked about God occasionally, but she never outright said she believed, and I did not want to push. She was a female and she was boy crazy. She is very interested in her cell phone and all things social media. More times than not that was half the battle, getting her off her phone. She is constantly taking selfies and snapchatting and it is through these forms of media she was able to show me some pictures with her and her friends. She also constantly would bring in Chick Fil A, meaning she left school for lunch which is against the rules, and often had silent lunch the following day. For the first month, or two that I was there she constantly had her head down. Nobody could get her to do any work, and I honestly thought that's how she would remain all semester long. Thankfully that was not the case, and she began to open up. I am truly glad she did because she had a lot to offer to class discussions and let me tell you that girl knows what onomatopoeia is. We played bingo one time, and she would say that word just to say it. Her personality went well with mine, on the last day of class she even fought to have me on her jeopardy team saying, "Brandi Jo is my girl she is with me". The girls wanted me on their team, but the boys also wanted me. Sass agreed to a coin toss, best two out of three, but when Sass lost she wanted to make it best five out of seven. She fought pretty hard for me, at least ten minutes, but the boys one so I was with them. That made me really happy because I did want her to like me and in that moment I knew she did. She also informed me on my last day that she didn't really remember any of the other college tutors because they were not as much fun as

me, which made me feel pretty good. Sass was not very good at staying on task, due to her phone obsession. I remember one time Mrs. Hamilton asked me to work with her, it was one of those days she just did not have a care in the world for school. I told her for each question we finished she could look at one snapchat story. Needless to say we finished that packet really quick. Sass was one of those students who honestly needed motivation and for someone to recognize her. She craved attention and if she was not getting it that's when I saw the head go down. All of these things about her made her a very special and unique student and she will always hold a special place in my heart.

Chameleon:

Chameleon had the ability to blend in with any surrounding. If kids were being unruly he would be unruly, but you pull him aside and go one-on-one he can be the sweetest kid. Heaven forbid his friends know he is smart and wants to go to college one day. He told me these dreams, but then when asked in front of the class by a sub he responded that, "School is stupid and I don't need it." Chameleon was hard to mentor honestly. I knew what he was capable of, but I just wasn't able to get him to display these talents in front of his classmates. It was definitely a pride thing. To him and to his friends being smart was not "cool". There was one day before spring break when he was the only kid in class that day. We worked on his project, talked, he told me of his love for animals especially the leopard gecko, and we had a grand ole' time. After that, he would never do his work in class, but when I came in one day with pictures from PetSmart of different animals (geckos, tarantulas, etc) it's like he became that person I was with before. He started ranting on and on about his gecko and showing me pictures, and he didn't even care what a soul thought. I did not get to learn much beyond that about him, but I can tell you this. If someone can break through to Chameleon and encourage him to not camouflage to everything that is safe to him he can really do something very special.

YOU AS A MENTOR, TUTOR, AND FUTURE EDUCATOR

While doing a personal reflection of myself as a mentor this is what I came across. I do feel like I reached my students level. Often when they were struggling with an assignment I was able to let them know that I am currently there in college; doing work that doesn't always seem to have a purpose, but it will help you in the long term. Due to the lack of an age gap I was able to connect with them on things such as pop culture, Netflix shows, and our similar cravings for Chick-Fil-A fries. I know I made progress with some of my students, like Passion and Sass. I truly feel as though they performed better when I was present. Now only if I knew how to make that extend to when I am not present. Sometimes being a tutor got in the way of my relationship for them as I became that dreaded person forcing them to do their work. At the end of the day though I do feel as though they had gained a level of respect for me. As a future educator this experience has helped shaped a lot of policies I want to implement in my classroom. Examples would be: no packets, no quizzes based solely on memorization, mutual level of respect, and making sure kids feel safe and loved. As a future educator I want to make sure students know that I have faith in their abilities, and that anyone who has ever told them they aren't smart is simply just wrong. I never want to have preconceived ideas about my students, or attempt to categorize them into boxes, because students cannot be boxed away. Each is unique and has weaknesses and strengths. It is figuring out how to use these weaknesses and strengths together, as well as showing that you believe they can accomplish anything they set their mind to that determines the success of your students. Also, it was extremely helpful having someone like Merida to talk to about my experiences at CCHS. I would recommend that for anyone student teaching to have someone like Merida who can serve as a new perspective, or a new insight. Also, sometimes it is good to just have someone listen to you and to give you advice when you are struggling with how to handle a situation.

