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Classic City High School Field Experience

Prior to starting my service learning at Classic City High School, I initially expected a similar environment as found in an inner-city school I had attended for a brief period of time. After we were told to not bring valuables such as purses, or expensive things of that nature to Classic City High School, it only confirmed my initial feelings on what to expect. However, after I began working there I noticed it was not at all as I anticipated. Although I did have many students who were constantly absent, the students who did attend class were extremely engaged and respectful in the classroom. I have thoroughly enjoyed my experiences at Classic City High School and will forever cherish the relationships I formed with the students in Mr. Jones's class. After completing this field experience, I am more confident in my choice of career path and it has reaffirmed my passion for the work and more importantly the students.

The classroom I was placed in was perfect for me as an aspiring English educator. The school itself defied my initial thought of what it would be like. The way the school was described to me was in a negative light, depicting the students as rough and in need of grave instruction, when in reality what I witnessed was far from that. I worked primarily with one student but would also conduct small group lessons or explanations if necessary. The male student I worked with had a drastic impact on me over the course of the semester. I would argue he taught me, just as much, if not more, than what I was able to teach him. In every way he is the opposite of me, however he has a desire to learn and crave for knowledge. He enjoys the social aspect of school

since he often does not have time between home, work and school, for friends. Literature and social studies are his favorite subjects, where as math is a longtime struggle of his. When he mentioned his love to learn and literature I immediately thought of the book, *Boys Will Be Boys? Bridging the Great Gendered Literacy Divide*. This book, written by Linda Bausch, looks into why boys generally do not like writing or literature classes, and often prefer the mathematics and sciences. This book tracks boys as they grow up to watch the fluctuations of when they will admit or say they enjoy reading and writing. He defies this studied ideal by enjoying these subjects; we often talked about his favorite kinds of books to read. He reminded me of my brother who has also loved reading and writing since a young age. I think it is important to find a book you like to read, this can help encourage a student to keep reading if they're genuinely interested in the material. His appreciation to learn new things is admirable, however he can find the amount of class work daunting when you add up his home responsibilities. He is the oldest child in his family, with the youngest child being only three years old, thus the responsibility of caretaker often falls on him. He not only has this forced family obligation, he also works outside of school to help his single mother provide for the family. We are different genders, different races, different socioeconomic classes, and come from different backgrounds, yet we worked incredibly well together. He likes to watch House of Cards and Friends, which are two of my favorite TV shows. He also likes to watch professional soccer; I played soccer all my life so I too love to keep up with the sport. If I didn't get the opportunity to work with this student my entire experience may have been different. This student is extremely outgoing, talkative and has a desire to understand, all of which are characteristics I demonstrate in my own personality. Having this similar personality helped us work together and understand one another.

When looking at my relationship with the student and all that we accomplished together, I am touched. The male student I found myself primarily working with had no trouble asking for help if he needed it or if he simply had a question. One example of an activity he struggled with initially was any that revolved around utilizing Google Drive or one that required the use of recent technology. I have been well equipped with Google Drive, being forced to complete various projects with this technology since middle school. However, he would constantly have questions such as: “How do I put bullet points in this?” “How do I change the font and size?” “Can I copy and paste into this?” As we talked about these formatting techniques he disclosed that he does not have a computer at home, he had never heard of Google Docs before and certainly never used it before. When I hear these remarks I wonder why the teacher required work to be done in this medium other than open the floor and give the students more options. Another struggle that this student and I worked through was spelling and grammar concerns. He would show me papers or presentations that were plagued with basic spelling and grammar issues, he would even occasionally call me over to ask how to spell a word I would have otherwise assumed he would have known. Many of the words he would ask for help spelling or defining are common in my daily vocabulary. When I witness this I wonder if this has been addressed previously or not. He is not a student who lacks motivation, which makes me think if a teacher took the time to go through this with him he would be more adept in this area. This student will be graduating in May, which is not what I would have thought after seeing these language struggles. Mr. Jones was more than accommodating and patient when instances like these would arise. More often than not if this student did not know how to spell a word and he asked for help, another student would have the same question but did not want to be in the position to need help. Mr. Jones would write the word on the board and leave it up there for the

entirety of the class and would go into a conversation about how to appropriately use the word or fix the grammar error. A final struggle I witnessed in my classroom among students was that they would get overwhelmed with a project and just give up on it. Mr. Jones was able to combat these situations by taking for instance a research paper the students have been working on this semester, and plan it out across a long span of time. This research project was broken down into small steps, that accumulated into small stages and eventually the completion of the last stage meant the completion of the project. This specific project was done on medieval England. The student's chose on what they specifically wanted to look into, whether it was what education looked like at the time or typical gender roles of the period. Each stage was comprised into three steps, stage one for this project was: pick three topics about medieval England you want to focus your paper on, find one image to represent each and finally find one credible website per idea. Mr. Jones would allot class time to complete these steps and stages as to not overwhelm the students and give them the opportunity to ask questions in class. He would have all projects completed in this way, setting them up into steps and stages, so the students would know what to expect. This idea of breaking a seemingly large project down into multiple steps to give students a sense of accomplishment is listed as a strategy in Lucy Martin's, *Strategies for Teaching Students With Learning Disabilities*. The idea of presenting a project in this way can help students who may not be encouraged, or those who need help managing time or a struggling student. He would also have expected due dates for the completion of a stage, but he would only grade for completion. Mr. Jones would then provide feedback to the student and he or she would then need to report back to him with the appropriate changes they agreed on. This method would keep students accountable, without the stress of a grade or the idea of dreaded busy work. One aspect of this that the students particularly struggled with was what qualified as a "credible"

source. Again, this was something I thought the students would be well aware of but instead we had multiple class periods dedicated to explaining what credible meant in regards to research. These constant encounters gave me perspective on my situation in life. A unique aspect of Mr. Jones classroom is the way he tests students. He does not have traditional tests; instead he has projects and papers as major grades. This is nice to utilize in a literature class, it gives students more free will and a way to showcase their creativity. He does however mostly conduct individual work, for an occasional project he will allow students to work together or bounce ideas off each other. I have learned so much about teaching accommodations through Mr. Jones's classroom style, and I have learned just as much by working with this student on a weekly basis.

Mr. Jones teaches English to both junior and senior high school students. He looks very intimidating, however he is tremendously understanding to all of his student's and their individual situations. Many of the student's have nicknames for him and both teacher and student are able to joke around with each other, yet they understand that he has authority over the classroom. Over my time at Classic City I have never seen him lose control of the classroom. He truly loves what he does within the school, he has been working at this high school for the last couple years and his wife is actually a professor at the University of Georgia. He will unfortunately be leaving Classic City High School to take a job at an alternative school in Barrow County. He will be taking a pay cut to make this move but he feels as though he can be more effective in his new position. His love for what he does is admirable and you can feel how much the student's enjoy his class and trust him as an educator.

If I were to pick apart the dynamic of the English classroom I would begin by stating what is immediately noticeable since my first day Classic City. Mr. Jones has a roster of eighteen

children, however a “good” day would be classified as an attendance of seven or more students. Unfortunately, there are students on his roster I have yet to meet. An issue with the lack of attendance on the teaching end of things is the need to individualize a lot of the learning. You will have one student who missed the last week, one student who missed only the last period, another who missed the two weeks previously, and so on and so forth; this puts the teacher in a predicament of wanting to move forward however in this specific situation more than half the class is behind. I have not witnessed good solution to this problem so far in my education career. Mr. Jones often would assign missed work as homework to be completed outside the classroom. This can be beneficial because it does not waste class time moving backgrounds and teaches students the responsibility of keeping up with their work and time management. However, this can be a poor way to keep students up to date because they often are behind in more than one class and work begins to pile up. Mr. Jones would constantly be talking to students about incompletes he had in the grade book. He would threaten to email and call parents, however this did not seem to rectify the situation. There are many pros and cons with any solution.

When looking at the institution and the way it is structured it is extremely clear that it is not a traditional setup. Many of the students work day or night jobs, sometimes both, and they have school to try and fit around their complex schedule. Many students will come in for a couple classes and leave mid day to work, or complete work online to help with scheduling. When I compare this aspect of the school to my own high school, I notice how traditional my school was and the different opportunities different schools can provide. Many students take advantage of the school’s relaxed take on in class direction to incorporate their work schedule. When compared to my high school we did not have a lot of online instruction, yet we had a similar option for working students. My high school had a program called “work based

learning.” You had to get approval from the school and your job would then act as either one or two periods of the school day. This program was for superior or accelerated students who might be ahead in school hours or who had already identified a career path. Many students who leave Classic City to work, their jobs are often more entry level such as working as a cashier or store clerk, where as in my high school this would not have been a possibility for work-based learning. Your work based learning had to be in a field you would see yourself in, and it had to have a level of prestige or credibility to the job. Our school had an impressive marketing career path program so many students took advantage of this and would complete work-based learning through this program. Jobs of these students would often include conducting research for a company or interning with a company, instead of a typical high school job. The stigma around working in the jobs many students at Classic City hold is much different than working outside of school was seen at my high school. Many of my peers had never had a job prior to this work-based learning experience and they only completed this program so it would look good for college applications and for experience, not for monetary reasons. Many of the students at Classic City are working to bring home a paycheck for their family or their future, both are admirable and I wish the students at Classic City could see that. The school itself is two floors but the student population is very small when compared to my high school. I attended high school in Forsyth County Georgia where we had a student population of about four thousand, where as Classic City High School is at about two hundred students. Because of this the class sizes at Classic City are much smaller, on any given day I was in my classroom the total number of students was never over ten. Where my classroom was taught under direct instruction, I know many classes had technology as a major influencer within the classroom. My teaching mentor, Mr. Jones, did not allow the use of cellphones in the classroom the only technology permitted

was computers that coincided with research projects. Even though students were aware of his policy they would try to sneak in a text message or ear buds, however Mr. Jones would immediately catch them and confiscate the phone. Not allowing phones helped to keep the students on track, but many would become frustrated and go to the bathroom to use their phones. A solution to this might be to have some days where you are not permitted to have phones and others where you can, depending on the tasks for the day. These small class sizes seem to benefit the students greatly because so many are on individualized schedules. The ability for students to work and attend school at their pace and schedule is extremely beneficial for those who need a program like that, however concern arises with students who need structure in a classroom. Due to the relaxed style of the classroom and school policy, I worry for students who are lost in the shuffle, the small class size I think helps to combat this issue but every student is different.

After comparing the opportunities given in my high school and those I have witnessed in Classic City High School, one novel my group read in class kept coming to mind. The book, *Closing the Opportunity Gap*, written by Prudence Carter and Kevin Welner, look into the issue of opportunities students are given based on area and demographic. Forsyth County, where I attended school, is a very wealthy area, compared to Athens Clarke, which is one of the poorer counties in the state. My high school had opportunities such as the work based learning program as well as career pathways that could give a student college credit. I personally completed the education pathway and I was able to receive credit for my first education class here at the university. Having this pathway option in the school can help a student decide on a future career, this can benefit students who plan on attending college or those who want to enter the work force immediately. There are no such programs that I have witnessed at Classic City, they instead have students who can complete work at home to help them keep a job and be in school

simultaneously. This difference in programs can illustrate a vital difference in the demographic of each area. The percentage of students who graduated from my high school and attended college is very high, compared to many students struggling to graduate here. Beyond college versus entering the work force, the demographic is different by race as well. In my graduating class of over nine hundred students, only six were African American. However in my specific classroom at Classic City, there are only African American students. One quote from the book that I think demonstrates this point perfectly is, “The longer that lower status groups have been denied equal access to opportunities, the more inequality has compounded the adverse effects of these groups-in some cases, rendering it difficult to catch up in subsequent generations.” I wonder what would happen if opportunities like what I witnessed at my high school, were to be implemented at Classic City. Some people assume students go to this school because they were struggling in the traditional classroom, however I know a student who will be graduating early because she wants to go into the military. I think the more options students have the better, and the more knowledge they can have to carry with them throughout their life.

As I reflect on my time at Classic City I have definitely developed my teaching philosophy and identified areas within the education system that I feel strongly for. I really wish I had more time at the school to continue building relationships and see more of my student’s personality. With one student in particular whom I worked with, I do feel like we made improvements together through the semester. My student became more used to working with different mediums such as Google drive. Another thing I tried to get my student accustomed to was not stopping when he got to a word he didn’t know when reading. He used to skip over it or just not continue, while we read together we would stop at words we didn’t know, circle them, look up the word and we kept a page in his binder of all these words we would come across. Mr.

Jones would reinforce this by keeping any word we came across for the day on the board. It was encouraging to know that he would continue to do this on his own without my guidance. I would come back the next week and the list would be longer than when we had worked together the week before.

Although demographically this student and I are very different, we were able to talk and find commonalities between us. I know in our own class we talked about how the Harry Potter series was something we all grew up with, yet this student hadn't read the Harry Potter series before. After talking to him and explaining what it was about, he started to read the series. It was so great to see him enjoy something I have grown up loving. I was able to joke around with this student, but he always remained respectful to me. Being so close in age to these students had me initially concerned about if they would be able to view me as a teacher figure to help them, rather than simply a peer. My experience went better than I could have imagined, being so close in age allowed me to connect with the student without it being daunting or scary, yet they understood that I was not in the same position as them and treated me accordingly. Overall these experiences have definitely helped me as a future educator.

My ability as a teacher has definitely grown with my experience at Classic City. Most importantly I have learned the importance of building relationships with my students. Having these relationships where your student has trust in you as a person, and an instructor, allows your classroom to run a lot smoother. Some of the struggles a student faces are easily combatted when a teacher who cares steps in to guide and aid a student. If a student trusts their teacher, what the teacher says or instructs will carry more weight and thus impact the student more. I can remember all through high school if I cared about what a teacher thinks, you try harder to succeed in their class. This seemed to remain true in Classic City, if a student felt as though the

teacher cared and wanted the student to succeed, the student in turn would put effort into their work. Even within my own relationship with one student, he would care what I thought about his work and genuinely ask me questions or for advice. I have loved building relationships with these students. Another takeaway I have from Classic City that will influence me as a future educator is accepting students as people. After listening to student's complaints, they all seem to break down to the same issue. Students would constantly complain about a teacher down the hall who would treat them like children who did not have valid, thoughts, opinions or problems. Often teachers put students into a box and immediately can think the worst. This does not encourage students to learn, which is a main job of being an educator. If a student needs an extension on a project, often a teacher can fall victim to assuming the student is lazy or that he or she does not care. I want to try and give my students the same credit I would want if roles were reversed. Another strategy I will takeaway specifically from Mr. Jones is his ability to break down a project. This may not seem like a big task or an important aspect to implement in the classroom, but it has proven very effective. With the students in Mr. Jones's classroom they are not highly motivated students so a large research project can appear daunting and undoable. With this mindset it can be hard to not only have the students complete the project but to have them try and learn something in the process. Mr. Jones would have the project broken down in multiple ways, so that it was manageable for the students and with each completed step the student received a sense of pride. I have learned so much from Mr. Jones as an instructor and he has been a great mentor to me, providing me with applicable words of wisdom.

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