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### My experiences at Classic City

#### The Institution

When I first arrived at Classic City, I immediately noticed how the structure of Classic City was in stark contrast to my high school experience. Considering the size, my high school had 4,000 students, and my graduating class had 888 students. Classic City, however, has significantly less students, possibly even around 100 if I'm remembering correctly. This atmosphere allows for more one on one attention.

It was especially interesting to be helping at Classic City at the same time that my cohort assisted in Clarke Central high school classrooms. When I talked to a student who had transferred to Classic City from Clarke Central, she said that she thrived from the individual attention, and she felt that she was held more accountable at Classic City. The main reason that this student had transferred schools was because of credit recovery, and the structure and computer-based instruction of Classic City especially helps these students looking to catch up.

Compared to my high school and my other current field experience, Classic City has a casual structure. For instance, at the other schools I was at this semester, I had professional attire and wore a nametag that said "Ms. Delaney". At Classic City, it was a change of pace to have a more flexible dress code. And I also went by "Elizabeth".

The structure at the classroom level was laid back, too. Ms. Johns, my mentor teacher, typically had students working independently at computers or at tables, and everyone was

learning at their own pace. One student may be working on a completely different assignment than the other. This affirmed my previous conception about the importance of differentiated instruction. With this format, students who were ready to move ahead onto new work did so, while students who needed extra time received it.

On the other hand, this structure may not be the best for outgoing students who learn especially well through socializing. Students learn by themselves, with the guidance of a mentor, or with the guidance of the teacher—but students may not learn with each other as much. Ms. Johns tried to compensate for this by including occasional class review games in her instruction, and there would also be lessons with handouts at times. But overall, students who prefer group work and discussions with peers may not benefit from this type of structure—because those tend to get left out with this structure.

Technology was a catalyst for the learning at Classic City, since many courses have videos, assignments, and quizzes all given online. In my opinion, when used correctly, technology can enhance learning. It gives students a new platform to create and present academic content, and I helped students at Classic City make Google Slides presentations. But, technology can also be a distraction. At Classic City, and at a middle school field placement of mine this semester, I've seen technology be both helpful and harmful. I've seen students use technology for coursework—and for outside gaming websites. Technology, then, requires a student to have self-discipline in order to effectively get work done.

#### The Teachers and Administrators

My mentor teacher, Ms. Johns, is especially dedicated to education. Multiple days a week, she teaches her high school students, and then stays after school into the night to teach adults at the night school (also housed in the Classic City High School building). Ms. Johns has a

great level of student awareness, and could always tell me which student was doing what. When I describe Ms. Johns, though, I'm particularly inspired by her level of compassion and patience with her students. I can tell that she enjoys her job, which is so important.

#### My Interactions with the Faculty and Staff

Coming into this school as a mentor and pre-service teacher, I was in a unique role, as I was neither a student or a teacher. The staff was extremely welcoming. Not only did Ms. Johns know me by name, she also talked with me, not to me. She respected me as a future teacher, and we had productive conversations together. I was fully included in the class, and well informed about current happenings.

#### *Ms. Johns and Student Behavior*

There was one instance where there was an issue with student behavior in Ms. Johns' classroom. The previous day, some students had been saying insensitive slurs that hurt the feelings of other students. Before class, Ms. Johns made me and another one of the mentors aware, so we could be on the lookout for this behavior. I felt that this was a compliment to be trusted enough by Ms. Johns to help her in addressing this. And, I ended up noticing that this issue had re-occurred, so I was able to let Ms. Johns know so she could direct this student to a counselor. This scenario might be one that I face in my classroom, so it was helpful to see how another teacher handled it.

#### *Ms. Johns and Instructional Software*

Ms. Johns also talked to me about the specific instructional technology she used. For instance, Ms. Johns liked showing Brain Pop videos to her students. But, the Classic City administration cancelled their school's subscription to the Brain Pop videos (even though Clarke County already paid for it.) The administration's rationale was that Brain Pop is for a middle school audience, but Ms. Johns told me that some of her students are still on an eighth grade level, and she could use those videos as review. So, teachers and administrators won't always agree. I knew this as an education major, but seeing an example of it in real time helped make me more aware.

There was also another website that Ms. Johns personally paid a subscription fee to in order to use its resources. Although I cannot remember its name, the website included vocabulary terms and videos to help her students understand concepts like grammar. Ms. Johns' attention to seeking out instructional software shows me that she finds it helpful, and really values it. Since the students at Classic City mainly learn through technology, Ms. Johns' decision to continue to use technology in the classroom caters to these students.

### *Ms. Johns and Direct Instruction*

When students were not working independently, Ms. Johns would use direct instruction. Her direct instruction included the instructional software mentioned above. I think this was a useful approach to help skill – development, especially for the more abstract areas of language arts. For instance, one of the main lessons that I witnessed involved students reading a short horror story, and annotating for examples of imagery and foreshadowing. In order to annotate for imagery and foreshadowing, students need a foundation of what those literary devices are, and working

directly with Ms. Johns helped, especially since she could gauge student understanding in real time.

The Students

### *Curriculum*

Many students were black and Hispanic, and one of the students I helped even spoke Spanish to me. I liked seeing the curriculum in the school, which was different from my high school language arts curriculum. For instance, students read a piece by MLK Jr., and also studied influential people advocating for Hispanic Civil Rights. I thought this approach was beneficial. Students were able to study relevant topics, while also developing their vocabulary and research skills. Specifically, Ms. Johns had students create a Google Slides presentation about Hispanic Civil Rights; I loved this, students were able to use language arts skills to learn about history. I never explored Hispanic Civil Rights in my high school.

*Student A* (name not included for privacy reasons)

Perhaps my most memorable and impactful student interaction I had at Classic City happened with student A, even though student A was only at Classic City for some of the time that I was there. When she was at Classic City, she was quiet and reserved. Appearance wise, this student is black, but sadly, I was never able to find out more about her. Based off of what I'm learning from my Language and Literacy in Secondary English Education course, I assume that this student may possibly use African American Language (AAL), and that is a tension in schools that use Standard American English. Again, this is only an inference, because I was not able to get to know this student well.

But there was one moment where I was able to see this student's perspective. Ms. Johns' class had a persuasive essay unit. Each student chose their own topic for the essay they needed to write. Student A composed a paper titled "Why We Should End Racism". While I don't remember every word in this paper, I know that this student wrote about how African Americans were seen as "killers", and that we should end racism because we're all "human." It was powerful and heartbreaking to read this, and I am so thankful I was made aware of this student's thoughts. I cannot fully understand these struggles, but this student made me a more informed future educator, and I will carry this experience with me moving forward. Reading this student's paper also made me realize how writing allows one to bring their voice into the world. I want my future students to be able to have that opportunity. Students' ideas matter.

#### *Student B*

This is the student that I saw the most consistently. During my time at Classic City, there was a week that I was unable to come in due to illness. So, two weeks passed between one visit and another. Student B was surprised that I remembered him, and his name, when I came back two weeks later. That made me wonder if perhaps he feels forgotten by some aspect of the school system.

In terms of demographics, student B is a Hispanic, teenage male. I was not able to find out about his social class, sexual orientation, or previous educational experiences. This student spoke Spanish to me some, and I wonder if English might be his second language.

A definite factor in student B's school experiences is that his friends, according to him, "don't do their work." Earlier in the semester, it was easier for this student to stay motivated, but in the later months, I noticed that he was getting distracted more, particularly by his friends

Snapchatting him during class. Additionally, this student would wear headphones a lot, and so he would not always hear us the first time that we spoke to him. I feel that this student receives mixed messages when asked to complete work, especially since Ms. Johns and his friends are asking different things of him.

One day, this student came into Ms. Johns' class visibly upset, and I asked him what was wrong. He said that he had a "bad day" in the class prior, and that he got in trouble without understanding why. These comments gave me insight into the eyes of this student—that he felt that his communication with the teacher did not always run effectively. As a future teacher, this reminded me how students carry emotions with them into the classroom. It also reminded me how I need to set an example when students are frustrated. I control the tone of my future classroom.

### *Student C*

I only worked with this student twice, but did my best to try to get to know him. Regarding the cultural background of this student, this student is black and male, but I did not find out any other facts about him.

He slept a ton during Ms. Johns' class, and Ms. Johns asked me to wake him up and get him re-focused on his work. I talked with him, and found out that he stayed in Ms. Johns classroom for two periods (so multiple hours at a time). This student is unaware why his schedule is designed the way it is.

I asked this student if he was ok, and found out that he doesn't sleep well at night. While helping him, my colloquial tone made him at ease, and we were able to complete work together. I took time explaining literacy concepts to him (such as theme), before we moved onto the next

section of the worksheet at hand. I wanted to ensure that this student was truly learning, and felt that we had a successful time together.

Ms. Delaney in Training (You as a Mentor, Tutor, and Future Educator)

I felt that I reached the students the best when I found things that I have in common with them. (For instance, with Student C, I talked about sleeping.) I had the most success when I talked with the students not from an authoritative standpoint, but from a collaborative standpoint. Students were most receptive when I acknowledged them before working with them.

I was able to reach these students at some level, because they remembered me, but I feel like I would reach them more if I had more than a semester with them, and if I could see them five days a week. This is an advantage that I'll have in my future classroom.

Based on my experiences at Classic City, I've learned more about the challenges that some of my future students will face. In my classroom, I will teach with compassion and genuine care, just like Ms. Johns. I also hope to create engaging, relevant lessons, so students may see the beauty and importance of learning (and maybe even share that with their friends).

This entire semester has taught me how the classroom contains both heartwarming and heartbreaking moments. I want my future students to know that I don't underestimate them, and that each one of them is so important.