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The Institution

Classic City High School is nontraditional in that students are able to come and go as they need. In my observations with Ms. Hanes, she on several occasions allowed students leave to go to work. They do most of their schoolwork on Google Classroom and very rarely have written work. This is different from what I experienced in school, where technology was used fairly infrequently. From what I heard from students, most of them seemed to like this format. Having access to material allows them to move through units at their own pace, and many of them blatantly told me that they hate writing by hand. However, there were times that a student would ask if they could complete an assignment by hand and the teacher would tell them no. In this sense, I think the structure of the school can stifle creativity at times.

When I first went to Classic City, I wondered if the students were really learning. It seemed like the dependence on technology would enforce getting side tracked and wouldn't actually allow students to absorb any information. I still feel that way to some degree, but not as intently. I think an environment that so openly accepts technology also invites the use of cell phones. Even though computer usage is highly encouraged, neither of the two teachers I worked with allowed cell phones to be used in their classrooms. Even after several requests for students to put their cell phones away, the students continued to use them and the teachers seemed to give up on enforcing the rule. However, I do not still have the mindset that just because their

information is online, they are not absorbing the information. In fact, I think being able to revisit the information whenever they please better encourages information retention for these students.

The particular student I worked with most often— let's call him Aiden—responded well to the use of technology. Aiden sometimes had trouble completing his work during the actual class period. He didn't slack off; it just took him longer to process things. He utilized the class' Google Classroom to complete his tasks at him, which he did very well. He was one of the students who did not like to write assignments by hand, so the use of technology fit well with his needs.

The Teachers and Administration

Aside from the insistence on the use of technology, both of the teachers I observed are extremely understanding and flexible. Ms. Hanes keeps blankets, snacks, headphones, lint rollers, and essentially anything a student might need in her classroom. She clearly communicates to her students that they were welcome to any items that they needed, and it is clear the Ms. Hanes was someone the students trusted. Mr. Clark is also popular among the students—I even had a student stop me in the hallway just to tell me that he is the best. His popularity, I believe, comes from how well he communicates with his students. He willingly offers one-on-one help and extends deadlines for students that needed them.

Both teachers mainly rely on technology for classroom instruction. Occasionally, they assign creative projects that involve drawing pictures, but I only saw that happen one time in each class throughout my entire time there. Most of their students are okay with mainly using the computers, they prefer typing to writing. However, for the one or two students that enjoy

expressing their creativity through written work, I believe they could benefit more from a hybrid use of traditional and technology instruction. What I enjoyed seeing was how intentional both teachers were with using technology for instruction. They created their own assessments that students could take online, there were interactive modules, videos, PowerPoints, and handouts that the students all had access to.

Classic City High School works hard to motivate their students to graduate and even gives out awards for weekly perfect attendance. I think in an environment like Classic City—where so many students are working against different odds to graduate—it would be useful to have more than one graduation coach, but that might be out of the school’s capability. There are many volunteers and mentors who come to help at the school, and I think the school does a good job of using manpower and resources appropriately.

The Students

Since I was back and forth between two classrooms, I did not always work with the same student. The student I worked with the most was Aiden. Aiden is a quiet, polite, witty, and hardworking. He is a sixteen year old African-American boy. He likes listening to Kendrick Lamar and has a girlfriend who also attends Classic City High School. Aiden and I got along pretty well because we are both more soft-spoken people, but we also like to joke around. I did not get close enough to Aiden to know about his social class, but I do know that he has a job. This is a different experience than the one I had in high school, as I did not have to work. Furthermore, as a white female, culturally I am different from an African-American male. To avoid clashing, I tended to talk to him about things I knew he enjoyed talking about (like Kendrick.)

As previously mentioned, Aiden is exceptionally hardworking. He gives respect to his teachers and participates in class. If Mr. Clark gave out written instructions that were dense, he would ask for clarification, but usually after hearing verbal instruction, Aiden was ready to work. Mr. Clark's class mainly involved individual work, but since Aiden has a quiet personality, he worked well in this environment. Aiden enjoyed English class and seemed to connect well with most of the material, but told me he struggled more in his math class. Aiden connected well with the use of technology in the classroom and performed well on most of his assignments. Any grades that were lower than he would like, he was able to use the feedback he got from Mr. Clark to make corrections. While the majority of students in Mr. Clark class liked to distract one another and be on their phones, Aiden did not get caught up in their behavior and tended to quietly and diligently work. Only occasionally was Aiden unable to focus and complete his work. The only rule Aiden seemed to challenge was attendance and being on time to class (he frequently came in after the bell had already rung due to chatting with his friends in the hallway.)

Aiden's strengths seem to be English as a subject itself and his discipline in his ability to stay on task. Interestingly, Aiden did not match up with the ethnography by Linda Bausch I read, *Boys will be Boys?. Boys will be Boys?* describes why boys tend to struggle more with reading than females. However, in this case, Aiden performed better in English class (in both reading and writing) better than most of the females in the room. In fact, when I think back to myself in high school, I got off task way more in a day than Aiden ever did the whole semester. Since I did not get extremely personal with Aiden, I do not know for sure why it is that he is at Classic City High School—except maybe perhaps for math support, but even that is a guess. What I do know is that he displays better work habits than I and many of my friends did in high school. Aiden

also asked me questions about college a lot, and it was with total honesty I was able to tell him I believed he has what it takes to succeed in college.

My Mentoring Experience

Because I divided my time between two classrooms, I felt like I wasn't able to reach students as well as I could have if I had been in the same place all semester. I think the most exciting and useful thing I did to reach students was talk to them about college and encourage them to graduate high school. My relationship with the students differed depending on how well I knew him or her. For Aiden, I was a helper and a friend. For the ones who saw me less often, I was a visitor who answered questions.

With Aiden, I believe I was a better mentor than I was a tutor. He did not really seem to want a tutor, so I do not think my presence made any difference in his grades. Being a tutor definitely gets in the way of being a mentor, as the tutor in me would say it was time to focus on an assignment instead of chatting with each other, but it did not get in the way of the relationship I had with Aiden.

I really enjoyed my time at Classic City High School because I got to observe teachers who were truly and outwardly dedicated to their students. Sometimes, it can be easy to get discouraged about being a teacher. *Closing the Opportunity Gap* by Prudence L. Carter and Kevin G. Weiner, for example, details all of the societal problems that teachers are expected to fix. It was refreshing to be in an environment where the teachers were actually faced with these problems, but met them with positive attitudes and flexibility. It has inspired me to treat my own students with just as much compassion and provide for them in every way that I can. From my experience, I am taking with me the knowledge of how to use technology in my classroom in a

way that students can benefit from, but I plan to also have outlets for creativity in an effort to eliminate the routine of always being on a computer or laptop. The idea that not all students learn the same way ties back in with my reading from *Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities* by Lucy C. Martin. There are ways of teaching that will work for some students, but not for every student. Finding the strategies that work the best for the classroom come from trial and error and getting to know the needs of your students.