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The teachers at Classic City High School don't have a planning period. The county rationalized this because the teachers arrive to work over an hour before students are required to show up; what the board failed to realize is that a majority of those teachers offer tutoring and even teach an extra class during this supposed "planning time". There are other difficulties that come with teaching in a non-traditional school such as this one. For example, Ms. James, the teacher I worked with, is only allotted five hundred sheets of copy paper for the entire year of instruction. A single ream to cover an entire year's worth of learning is slim indeed, even if the classroom revolves significantly around the use of technology. James is required by the school to print yearly paper work, syllabi, and classroom expectations for all of her students at the beginning of the school year. Needless to say, she was printing new worksheets on the backs of recycled worksheets and diagrams by the time I entered her classroom in January.

One ream of paper seems cheap, but the graduation coach told us going in that the school used the online curriculum it did because of the low price tag the curriculum offered. (I think it's important to note that the school was originally funded by the Gates Foundation, but they later pulled their support.) Classic City offers face-to-face as well as computer lab based instruction, and during my experience I served in Ms. James' lab based class. Technology in the classroom, especially programs such as Google Classroom, are wonderfully helpful for students with non-traditional schedules. It allows for flexible due dates, collaborative projects, and fast feedback

from the teacher. But during my experience this semester, I was not impressed with technology at all.

Edgenuity (formerly e2020), keeps students completely disengaged from what they're learning. The videos and assignments are mind-numbing, and the students in Ms. James' class were constantly asking her to unlock the next assignment or test. Because it's a lab-based class, it can be out of the supervising teacher's content area—in fact, there were only two students in that class period that were taking English online. All the other students worked on some sort of language, math, science, and even health. Because it's an online class, instructions and explanations were often inadequate and required an actual teacher to understand. The problem then arises that Ms. James is an *English* teacher. She had no idea how to help her students learn Spanish grammar or comprehend Newton's Laws of Motion. As one only slightly removed from high school, I'm hopeful that I was of some help, even though I often had to Google explanations myself before conveying knowledge to the students.

Another glaring issue with the program is the inadequate timeline it expects students to follow. As Ms. James explained to me, the curriculum doesn't account for weekends, holidays, testing, or teacher work days, all of which will inhibit student progress. If a student doesn't keep up with the timeline projected by the curriculum, their grade is affected. Suppose a student is supposed to take a test on Wednesday the 18th, but that student is on Spring Break on the 18th; the computer will put a zero in the gradebook for the test and drag the student's grade down. Kids, Ms. James told me, will be whole weeks behind because Edgenuity doesn't account for mandatory state testing, which affects the grade that goes on progress reports. James told me that sometimes she'll have grades that jump up an entire letter grade at the end of the semester, because the program thought that the students were behind in lessons the entire semester, until

Ms. James goes in and manually fixes the grading issues. And the state pays *how much money* to have this outside company come in and drag students through the most mind-numbing lessons in history?

Another downside to the lab-based instruction is that it doesn't allow for a teacher/student—or mentor/student—relationship to form. I'll admit, I had a very difficult time getting students to interact with me, because they had to wear their headphones in order to hear the online lectures. Most of the time I bounced from student to student, offering them encouragement if they performed poorly or praise if they passed a certain section of the unit they were in. I also never ended up actually helping anyone with English; because it's a lab-based class, Ms. James is required to teach students out of her subject area. I helped kids with Spanish, Physical Science, and Math, and even then I almost needed a refresher course myself. I remember one student, T, who asked me to check over his math homework and explain how to combine polynomials with exponents. I read up on how to do it in the student's notes and then I also went on Google to figure out the correct process, and then I relayed it to him the best way that I could.

I had a similar experience with a girl, S, who asked for help with science. I had almost no idea how to help her, because I'm four years removed from my own physics class. As we were struggling through the problems together, I got to know her a little bit. S is a quiet and studious girl, who is working on getting her certification to be a Nursing Assistant through a pathway at Classic City. She was the only one I observed that worked the entire class period without pulling out her phone once. I knew that she wanted to learn; she wanted to understand what the course was trying to teach her, and yet I was almost completely helpless as a tutor. I had multiple teachers in middle school who were required to teach out of their subject area, and I didn't think

much of it at the time, but after this experience, the notion that a teacher could successfully teach something outside of their degree is ridiculous to me. The only fact that I feel I was able to successfully relay to S was the meaning of the words “dew”, and “crucible”. The world “crucible”, I could understand, but I was a little surprised that she had never been taught what a dewdrop is, which gets into a whole different set of science literacy issues.

The first book our group read, Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance was a book comprised of essays written on various topics that trouble American schools. It was edited by Prudence L. Carter and Kevin G. Welner, and directly related to my time at Classic City High School in a plethora of ways. In the book, it discusses all the inequalities in society that lead to the achievement gap in schools. Most of the kids at CCHS had fallen victim to at least one of the topics covered in the book. Issues from poverty rates and the societal reasons behind them, problems caused by rigorous testing, school funding and budget cuts, and teacher education programs, and even discussions on the philosophy of education itself were thriving in Classic City. There were two students in Ms. James’ class who had parole officers, which meant they spent less time in the classroom and therefore less time learning. As the book explained, and I discovered, issues outside of schooling itself has led to the low standardized test scores and high dropout rates that define schools like Classic City.

The second book we read was actually an ethnography a woman did to discover why boys typically have lower literacy rates than girls. Called *Boys Will be Boys?: Bridging the Gendered Literacy Divide*, and written by Linda S. Bausch, it opened my eyes to some of the reasons why boys specifically lose interest in reading. From what I could tell in my field experience, the students weren’t reading anything that was interesting to them. As ninth and

tenth graders, the students were required to read various stories from Greek mythology, and sections of the Odyssey, and those stories are only suitable for a very specific kind of person. Because the course was taught online, the boys had no choice as to what they got to read—which is one of the suggestions that Author has in the ethnography on how to get boys engaged in what they're reading. From what I could see, the online reading was only distancing CCHS students even further from what they were reading.

The last book we studied, Lucy C. Martin's Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities, had suggestion after suggestion on how to help students with a diverse range of abilities in the classroom. Although none of the kids in Ms. James' classroom needed extra support to my knowledge, the book had other ideas on issues like chatty classes and utilizing technology to its fullest potential that could definitely apply. The most shocking issue to me was *just how often* students had their phones out—it was almost constant. Taking the phones up, using them to learn, or allowing for timed “phone breaks” were all wonderful ways the book suggested to take control of the class's cell phone problem. There were also an abundance of games and tactics that would be great in teaching reading and writing, but as I've already mentioned, this was a lab-based class that was taught by a random lecturer through the screen of a computer. Title did mention utilizing online courses for students that would benefit from the individual, set-your-own-pace, self-directed learning that Edgenuity and other such programs offer, but from what I observed, this method of teaching was almost completely ineffectual for the students in Ms. James' class.

This course has only reinforced to me how ridiculous the outsourcing and profitability of knowledge has become in this country, but it's also opened my eyes to some practical steps I can take in my own classroom one day. Understanding the exact inequalities that lead to achievement

gaps in schools has offered ideas on how to tackle these problems on a small scale, and I've also come away with ideas on how to engage with my students and simply care for them well.

Ultimately I'm walking away with a greater comprehension of just how difficult it is to be a marginalized student, and what I can do as a future teacher to offer everyone an equal education.