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LLED 3461S

April 30th, 2018

Final Project

The Institution

In comparison to other schools I have spent time in over the years, there are many aspects of Classic City High that make it similar to other schools but there are also many aspects of Classic City High which make it unlike any other school that I have ever experienced. For starters, the location and facade of the building are quite nontraditional. On the first day I went to volunteer it took quite some time just to find the building. Once I entered the building however, I noticed it was just like every other school. The walls were filled with bulletin boards, prom dues reminders, and an abundance of student work. Any preconceived notion which I had going in was immediately wiped from my mind and I decided right then and there to remain as open minded as possible going forward.

Initially I was expecting to be placed under the wings of an english teacher. However, I was asked if I minded sitting in on a U.S. History class. Considering that U.S. History was my favorite subject in high school, I was ecstatic. Truthfully, I would have been happy anywhere they placed me but being in a history class was a win in my book. As far as how the classroom I was placed in functioned, I definitely had to adapt. My high school experience was very hands

on. Even in history classes when it often feels all you can do is lecture, my teachers found ways to make the experience more enjoyable with a variety of hands on learning activities. I feel as though nearly 90% of time in this class was spent lecturing and taking notes. Also in my high school, we also only used one-on-one technology on occasion whereas CCHS relies on one-on-one technology quite heavily.

As I would walk down the hallways coming and going, I would often times peek into the other classrooms to see if we were the only ones using the laptops as frequently as we were. To my surprise, all the rooms I looked into were also using their laptops just as often as my classroom was. After several trips to CCHS, I was able to come to the conclusion of how I felt about the computers. I would like to be by stated that I love technology in the classroom. I believe that technology has opened so many doors for students who have grown up in a generation where their lives are surrounded by the newest gizmos and gadgets. Technology is an extremely useful tool that often times has little to no limitations. However, what I noticed is that students were no longer learning the material, they were learning how to beat the system. Students were tuning out during lectures and only paying just enough attention to fill in the blanks of their notes which were required. When they might have missed an answer, they were either content with leaving it blank or would ask a fellow classmate for the answer. I respect the intentions of the teachers, however I feel as though there may be a way to find a more proactive balance.

The Teachers and Administrators

My teacher was very admirable. He was extremely understanding of each of his students' needs and I feel thankful to have been able to observe and assist him. What I liked most about my mentor teacher was his ability to relate with the students. Whenever a student had a question, he would answer it in terms that they could understand and he would relate the lesson to experiences which may be relevant to them. For example, one day we were learning about The Great Depression. We were discussing The Stock Market Crash and the bank crisis which swept America. Students began raising their hands left and right— behavior which was quite out of the ordinary for this specific class. Money was obviously a topic which they wanted to discuss and instead of answering a few questions and then moving on, my teacher took up the entire class period talking with the students about money, taxes, loans, and savings. With each question a student asked came another question from a different student. My teacher didn't get concerned about not finishing his lesson but instead took this valuable teaching opportunity to inform his students on the real life factors of financing in adulthood. The students were engaged and intrigued. They expressed genuine interest and he ran with it. I was so impressed with my teacher for not cutting them off as so many of my teachers in the past have done with me and my classmates. He took the opportunity to share real life advice with his class.

He was also an extremely patient person. A lot of the students seemed to have apparent issues with authority. Most of them were very quick to rebuttal or push back when given instruction. During instances when his students would push back, he wouldn't push against them. Instead, he met them somewhere in the middle. He would ask what he could do to make it easier on them as long as it was reasonable. Sometimes students would refuse to listen to him and on occasion even storm out of the classroom, but often times students would attempt to work with

him to resolve the issue. If students were ever resistant towards putting in the work, he would set small goals for them rather than expect them to finish the entire worksheet or assignment. It is so easy for someone observing from the outside to comment on behavioral issues and how teachers should handle situations however, it is extremely different when you are the one who has to do the disciplining. I feel as though my mentor teacher obtained the perfect amount of patience and guidance.

The Students

My role in the classroom was to essentially be a floater. I worked with nearly all of the students in the classroom which was quite the pleasure. Each student had a different outlook on education which served as a wonderful learning opportunity for me. There was one student in particular who I noticed was quite different from his classmates. Each day he would come in fully prepared and loaded with questions. He was also very bright as he knew almost every answer to the questions that were asked. His work was never turned in late and he was always the first to complete an assignment. He was truly the ideal student. While this student was a pleasure to have in the classroom, he was a rare exception. The other students did not seem to have the same interest in education as he did.

Most students came in unprepared and uninvested. As soon as the teacher began lecturing, their headphones were in and they were on their phones. At many times throughout the semester, it felt as though the teacher was lecturing only to me considering I was the only one paying attention. When students were asked to take their headphones out, they immediately

sucked on their teeth or talked back. On rare occasions when certain students participated, they gave one word answers or made jokes with hopes of gaining a laugh from their fellow classmates.

One of the most memorable experiences I had took place on a day when students were taking a test on their computers and the wifi shut off. Thankfully, most of the students had finished their tests before the internet went down, all with the exception of one. Even though the teacher gave them an allotted amount of time to finish their tests, she took advantage of his patience and thought she was going to be able to avoid doing extra work by using the whole class period to complete her test. She spent a majority of her time staring at the wall even after he repeatedly asked her to hurry and complete the exam. When the internet went out, she lost all progress made on her test. The teacher informed her that all her work was lost and that she would have to retake the test and she grew very aggressive with him. She cursed at him aloud in front of the other students and stormed out of the room, refusing to complete her test any other day. The teacher didn't fight back and instead allowed her the rest of the afternoon to simmer down. Considering I was in all of the gifted and advanced classes in high school, this was behavior which I had never witnessed before. My peers were ideal, cookie cutter students who never seemed to resist authority.

With much of the bad comes a great deal of good. On occasion I would overhear conversations about post-graduation plans which sometimes included college. Students would talk about becoming police officers, fire fighters, businessmen, and everything in between. It was such a delight to hear them speaking of all the wonderful opportunities that the world had in store for them. These conversations led me back to the book we discussed in class called *Limbo*.

Limbo detailed the experiences of growing up blue collar with white collar dreams. I feel as though a great deal of the students at CCHS who chose to pursue careers in fields which may be considered “white collar” may experience similar struggles in their own lives. The book also highlighted the importance of “blue collar” jobs and their role in society. This kind of information is what should be relayed to students like those at CCHS who may feel as though they don’t have the opportunities others do.

Me as a Teacher

I would like to be completely transparent. I cannot sit here and say that it is my life’s desire to teach in a Title I school. I don’t have the overwhelming feeling that I have to help and save students who weren’t blessed with the educational opportunities that I was blessed with. What I do know however, is that I will follow my heart wherever it leads me. While I don’t have the burning hunger to work in schools stricken with poverty and crime, I don’t have any qualms with doing so. If I am lead to an opportunity to work in a Title I school that feels right and fits for me, I will. If I am given the opportunity to work in a private school that feels right and fits for me, I will. I have an open mind and heart and I want to teach students who need and want to be taught. So no matter where I end up, I am thankful for the experience to serve as a mentor at CCHS. Classic City High School, being as unique as it is, offered invaluable experiences. I am grateful for the learning opportunity and wish all the students I came in contact with the best of luck going forward.