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Experience Paper

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Experience at Classic City High School

The first time I entered Classic City High School, I immediately began to compare the school to the traditional high school that I attended. I went to South Forsyth High School in Cumming, GA, a standard school with a large campus and a large student body. There were around 900 students in each grade at South. This is different to the non traditional setup of Classic City High School, but I think that the differences are there to benefit the students.

One of the main differences is that there is a mix between “face to face” teaching and “lab activities” in the classrooms at Classic City. When I was in high school, I was taught in a “face to face” setting only, where students at Classic City are often taught through “lab” classes that are online programs that present the information through a video demonstration. The demonstration is then followed by online assessments. At first, I saw this difference as a negative. I did not think that online instruction was the best way to teach the students. Over time, I realized that there was a benefit to online lessons and assessments. One student I met with reminded me of the benefit when she claimed that she would be able to complete her lesson during her break at work, and another reminded me that he had plenty of time to do the lesson so that he could work on it at his own pace. For these students, with different lifestyles and learning needs, the online coursework is beneficial to them. Using technology in this way allows them to get work done when they can and in the amount of time that they need. I also

think that students today may respond better to technology centered lessons because they enjoy using technology and have grown up with constant access to it.

During my time at Classic City, I was involved with an English teacher, Ms. Johns. During the period that I was working in, she had a “lab” class, but she also taught “face to face” classes at other times during the day. Although her class during this period was mostly online, if more than one student was working on a particular subject or piece of literature, she would try to go through it with them together, in a sort of “face to face” fashion, which I thought was beneficial to the students involved. Ms. Johns was very attentive to the needs of her students and was there to offer support and guidance. The overall staff at Classic City was great as well. I did not interact with many of them, but I did see the administrators as well as Ms. Mimi out in the hallway during class changes, engaging in discussions with students. Each administrator seemed to be able to ask personal questions that showed that they had made the time to get to know the students, which was very encouraging.

The first two visits at the beginning of the semester, I did more of a general observation of the students in the classroom, and answered questions around the room. During this time, I was not reading the book my group discussed about the reading levels and tendencies of boys versus girls, but the information I gathered helped to analyze the situation when I looked back on my experience. *Boys Will Be Boys* by Linda Bausch discussed the tendency and the reasoning behind male students losing interest in reading as they grow older. Looking back, I can say that there was a difference in the interest level of male students in their literature coursework, and the female students in my classroom. The girls were more engaged in the story and were better at relating it to things they had read before, whereas the boys just wanted to rush past it to get

to the next section, even going as far as guessing the answers to a quiz based on a reading, with no concern and without looking back. Even though Bausch studied younger students, her ideas were prevalent in the high school classroom.

I worked with 3 different students while working in Ms. Johns classroom. I worked with one boy and two girls, and for this project I have decided to talk about one of the girls who I will simply refer to as K. I worked with K for the majority of my time, and I really enjoyed getting to know her and helping her with her English course. K was had a very... sassy personality. She loves fashion and makeup, evidenced by her large makeup bag she would bring to class. I also enjoy makeup, so we would discuss trends and techniques occasionally. She was also loud, which is a little different from me, I tend to be more reserved. She wanted to talk to the whole class and tried to gossip with me for the majority of the time rather than actually focus on her work. Through this gossip I learned a lot about K's life and the struggles she has been through.

K is an African American student raised by a single mother, in what I can assume is a lower income household. This is very different from the way that I was brought up, and it did give me insight into another way of life that I am not accustomed to encountering. Contrary to what I expected based on her characteristics, she did have a great deal of respect for Ms. Johns and followed the classroom rules very well compared to her peers. K lacked motivation, and always claimed that "(she) would do it later....in bed with a movie". Although she was hard to motivate, once she got moving, she took excellent notes from every lesson I observed. I think her main problem in school is that she just was not motivated, but I do think that working with her helped her to be more excited about school and about finishing her lessons.

K had one particular life experience that I think has caused to be behind in school. She told me that when she was 15 (she is almost 17 now) she had to leave school because she was pregnant. This time away from school has set her back one year in school. At the end of the pregnancy, she delivered the baby, but he died minutes after being born. The physical emotional and psychological effects of this caused her to miss a lot of school, and once she returned, she revealed to me that she was on anti depressant medication. She told me about how it could sometimes affect her performance in school, how it gave her mood swings occasionally that were hard to deal with in the classroom. My group presented on anxiety disorders and medication prescribed and what kind of effects this could have on students. Even though this was not an anxiety problem but a depression medication, I was still able to put that knowledge to use when thinking of her situation and how it could affect her schoolwork and social life in school.

I think that K learned well through the online courses because she enjoys technology. She is very invested in her Instagram account and she also really enjoys listening to music. The online courses allowed her to do this, while still reading and taking notes. She was really great at multitasking, but I think this generation of students is used to multitasking, because they are inundated with stimuli from so many different sources. One thing that I think she did struggle with specifically in her English course is basic grammar. She did not talk that way, so I think it was hard for her to write that way. Overall, despite her struggles and grammar, K was very bright when she was ready and motivated to do her coursework. A lot of K's background and school history is different from me, but I did see a similarity in myself based on her lack of motivation. In school my teachers and my parents would tell me that I did good work, but I was

never motivated to actual “get down to business”. When I came home I wanted to play or watch TV and I always put studying off to the last minute because I had no motivation to start early.

Based on the information in the book my group discussed, *Adolescent Lives in Transition*, I could better understand the difficulties K faced because of her socioeconomic status. Although our book discussed this particular problem in middle school aged students, I was still able to make connections between the students in the book and K. I could see that she did not always come to class prepared, as in she did not always have paper to write on or a pencil to write with, which caused her to spend extra time looking for one, or asking the teacher for one. The difference between K’s situation and the one present in our book was that K was surrounded by people of the same status, unlike the students in *Adolescent Lives in Transition*. I think that this made the peer pressure to conform and to have the “latest thing” less prevalent at Classic City. The majority of students are on the same playing field, and this allows them to be more focused on their schoolwork, which is slightly different from a traditional school where there are a lot of students from different backgrounds.

I have been in other mentor roles in the past. In high school, my theatre director paired each junior with a freshman, so that they would have a sort of mentor/ mentee relationship in theatre and a friendship as well. I was able to offer my mentee advice for auditions, how to handle not getting cast, and how to navigate life as a teenager. We are still friends to this day, and I think it is fair to say that we both benefitted from the relationship. Although I did not get to spend as much time with K, I still think that we formed a positive, mutually beneficial relationship. I think that it was an appropriate mix of personal discussions and academic ones. I

gave her some advice about a bad relationship she was in, that she took and it worked out for the better for her. I also think that the tips I gave her about writing and grammar also helped her. I read a sample of an essay she had turned in and it was much better than the first time I had read her work. I think just the fact that I was there gave her a reason to do her work, and I think she saw the advantage of me being there to give her hints and suggestions of how to word something or which answers she could eliminate. At times I do think that my role as a tutor was sometimes hard to be because she had so much to say about her personal life. When I tried to cut in so that we could get back to work, I did not want it to seem like I didn't want to listen or that I didn't care.

My time at Classic City has impacted me in a way that I was not expecting. To be honest, I have never been around this demographic before. I went to South Forsyth high school, and if you anything about this history of Forsyth county... well let's just say that I graduated with about 10 African American Students. This mentor and tutor role has put me in contact and in the mix with a people group that I am not used to being in the classroom with, and this has been very beneficial to me. I have been able to see (somewhat) how they react to teachers and how they conduct themselves in the classroom, something that without this experience, I may not have had until I began teaching my own classes. This is also my first time "teaching" any type of literature or English subject to the age group that I want to teach, and so to be able to teach and tutor in my discipline has been amazing. I think from this experience I have learned that different students have very different learning needs and also different backgrounds that cause to behave and think differently in the classroom. Being able to relate this experience back to the information I learned while reading the books from our book clubs.

As far as my role as a future educator, I have learned from this experience that I need to be attentive to students needs and to make sure that they are doing well. In the classroom that I was tutoring in, Ms. Johns was always available to her students and there to answer questions and even to hand out crackers. Having teachers in my own education experience that were open to discussion and acted as if they truly cared have really impacted me and made me realize that I need to be that way with my students. I have also realized that some of my students will come into my class with problems that can affect their school work, and that I need to be somewhat understanding. I also have learned more about different cultures and how they act in the classroom, which has caused me to think about teaching different cultures how they could respond differently to different activities and attitudes. Over all, my experience at Classic City has been very beneficial and helpful in my path to becoming an educator. I will definitely consider helping there in the future during my time at UGA. I am very thankful for this opportunity and the experiences I have had during my time at Classic City.