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My Experiences at Classic City High

The Institution

I tutored mainly in Mrs. Scott's second period math classroom, but because the Athens busses got me to Classic City so early, I ended up helping in the second half of her first period class as well. The two classes were set up differently. The first class was for students who had not taken the course before, so it had face-to-face instruction and worksheets instead of computer programs. The second class was for students who had taken the course and failed, and this was a computer based program. Sometimes another teacher, Ms. Knight, would also come in to help, but seemingly at random. Mrs. Scott told me that this was their first time using this particular program, so even the teachers had a little bit of difficulty using it sometimes. This program had all the lessons, instructions, quizzes, and tests on it, so the teachers were really only there to help if students had questions and to make sure kids behaved and did their work.

The way the first class was set up reminded me of how high school was for me, only the class size was a lot smaller. The face-to-face instruction with detailed lessons on how to do each type of problem, the worksheets with many problems they had to do, and the students doing the problems on the board to show to the class all reminded me of my math classes throughout high school. The second period class, however, was very different from how my classes were because

I never had a computer program be instructor for my learning. Furthermore, there was never homework given, but sometimes Mrs. Scott encouraged the students to work on the program outside of class so that they could be sure to finish the course and move on or graduate, but she did not all the time.

Since I spent most of my time in the second period class, I will focus my response on that class. The set-up of this class was very interesting, but I think it worked better in theory than in reality. The online program catered to the individual concepts the students failed when they took the course previously, and it allowed them to take pre-tests so that time wasn't wasted teaching them things they already knew. Students could work at their own pace, and if they made up the credits they needed before the semester ended, they could use that class time for something else productive. If a student really cared about his or her education, this system would be great and productive. However, I did not see that very often, or at least till the very end of the year, and the students could see how close they were to finishing. Otherwise, I saw that the online teachings only caused more dissonance between students and their learning. The computer program would play a video to explain the concept that the students were learning, but many did not even put headphones in to listen to what the person was saying. The videos had no subtitles, so the students were not learning. Few students took notes. They only cared enough to pass their test and move on to the next section. I think that face to face instruction would have encouraged them to care a little more about their studies. The only other advantage of the computer program was that it seemed to take the edge off taking tests. In one of our book club books *My Age of Anxiety*, there was a part where it talked about test anxiety and how badly that can affect students. In most classrooms, tests are taken very seriously. They are weighted heavily, and this can cause stress in students, especially with the environment it creates. A

testing environment is typically quiet and filled with tension from other students taking the test. That nervous energy spreads and builds between students and can cause them to perform poorly. However, I did not see this in Classic City because the students were working at their own pace and testing at different times. The environment was no different from any other day, so it took a lot of that added stress off students. The overall relaxed environment took away a lot of stress, but I also worry that they simply did not care about their grades. I wish the online program had helped more students, but overall I think it hindered their success.

Teachers and Administrators

It was interesting to see Mrs. Scott in both classrooms settings, both teaching and leading instruction and also supervising. She was mainly strict, but she could also joke around with the kids. While the students respected her, I could tell that they wished she was more fun. There was one student who came in and slept for the entirety of class every class. I thought it was strange that she allowed that to happen when she was normally strict with sleeping with other students. She told me that she had tried talking to him before, but there was nothing she could do, so she kind of gave up. I understand how difficult it can be to deal with students like this all the time, but it also made me a little sad that she had just given up on him.

The second period class loved Ms. Knight though. She did not always come, so the students would be a little sad when she wasn't there. Ms. Knight knew how to joke and relate to the students while still commanding respect. At the beginning of the semester, she would start the class off by writing a brain teaser or something on the board to get the students to start thinking about math. They were things such as trying to get them to name the presidents on the bills or math related riddles. The kids seemed to enjoy it, so I cannot figure out why she stopped doing it.

I like both Mrs. Scott and Ms. Knight. They were nice to me and made it clear how much they appreciated my help and enjoyed me coming. Most of my time was spend helping the students, but sometimes I would clean the room a little or staple and hole punch papers. When I first started coming, they let me know the best way to help the students so that I wasn't just giving them the answers. They gave me useful tips such as encouraging the kids to take notes because it helps me when I'm trying to help them, as well as helping the students. They told me that I could do whatever I felt comfortable with and that, in their class, I was like another teacher. They gave me the authority that I needed to feel comfortable not only mentoring, but also being a leader in the classroom.

I think that the decision- whether it was theirs or someone higher up in the school- to use computers for this course overall hindered the students. Because it was new, Mrs. Scott and Ms. Knight had some trouble with it at first. Furthermore, it required the teachers to put in a passcode for the students to take a test or continue to the next section, so a lot of time was wasted for the teachers to come over to the student and find the code. Overall, it was not very productive.

I did not get to see how the administrators served as guidance and graduation coaches since I was not paired with an individual student. From what little I observed, the students all seemed to like and trust Ms. Mimi. Before I started going to the first period class, I would spend some time sitting in Ms. Mimi's room, and students constantly came in and out, asking for advice, snacks, or just saying hi. She seemed great, and the students are very lucky to have someone who cares as much as she does.

The Students

I think my biggest regret about this experience is that I did not get to know the students as well as I wanted to. I was hoping that I would eventually be paired with a student, but that didn't happen. As soon as I started getting closer to the kids in the class, the semester was finished. On the other hand, I was glad that I got to know the class as a whole because it was a great group of people, so I'll spend some time talking about a few of the students I got to know best (all names have been changed to protect the students' identities).

I met Chyna before I had even been assigned a classroom. I had been talking with Ms. Mimi, and she came in because she wasn't feeling well. Ms. Mimi gave her a snack, and Chyna hung around while we talked. Chyna was in Mrs. Scott's second period class, so Ms. Mimi had her walk me there. On the way, Chyna told me that she didn't like Mrs. Scott because she could be kind of mean. Throughout the class, when Mrs. Scott would say something mean or strict, Chyna would look at me with an "I told you so" sort of look. She treated me like we were already friends. Unfortunately, Chyna didn't show up to class often. I wasn't sure if it was because she skipped or had other priorities like family or work. Instead of automatically judging her as another kid who hated school, I tried to keep in mind the things that I read in our book club book *Adolescent Lives in Transition* about how many students, even as young as seventh grade, have many large responsibilities outside of school like taking care of siblings or working. I wish I had had more of an opportunity to talk with her and see what was going on in her life. Even though I only saw her a handful of times after that, she still treated me like a friend.

Tommy was the first student that I helped with school work. While the other students were hesitant to ask for my help, Tommy almost immediately called me over to have me check an answer. He is extremely talkative and likes to get sidetracked, so much so that Mrs. Scott and Ms. Knight warned me that one of my jobs with him was to keep him focused. While I am not

certain, I think he may either have a minor learning disability or be on the autism scale. I probably learned the most about him since he is so talkative. He loves to read sci-fi, especially *Star Wars*, and likes to play Dungeons and Dragons. We bonded a little about that because my boyfriend likes those things too. Tommy is incredibly smart, but has trouble focusing. He constantly got caught up in other students' conversations, a book he was reading, or his own thoughts. I would often go work a couple of problems with him to get him working at a good pace, and then I would let him finish on his own. He was always excited to see me when he came in for class and tell me all about what he did over the weekend, and it made me happy and excited to tutor every week.

Kenny was the most unexpected student I made a connection with. On my first day, I talked with her briefly about nose rings because we both had one, but it was a short conversation, and she seemed disinterested. However, I helped her and the boy next to her with their work often enough for them to grow comfortable around me. By the end of the semester I felt like I was talking and joking with them almost like Ms. Knight could. When she came in, one day towards the middle of the semester, she asked if I could come more because she started to miss me throughout the week. While I did not have enough time in the week to come more often, that one little comment made me feel good not only about the work I was doing at Classic City, but also about my choice in being an educator. It made me feel like I could be a great teacher one day. She was one of the few students to finish their course work early and use the period as a free period for the rest of the semester, and I was so proud of her when she told me.

Although I started very shy and nervous, by the end of the semester I felt like I fit in. I could joke with the students and they could joke with me. I was very nervous about being in a math class since I'm an English major, and I told them that. We could joke about how I wasn't

great at math at the beginning, but I got better as the semester went on. I even gave a couple of the students recommendations on what books they should read next, and we talked about how wonderful reading is. I found this interesting because in *Boys Will Be Boys?* one of our book club books, the author wrote that, after third grade, fewer boys kept reading than girls, but I only saw boys reading, and I only talked about books with the male students. Overall, the students helped me feel like an important part of the classroom, and not just an extra hand in the classroom.

Me as a Mentor, Tutor, and Future Educator

I feel like I reached a few of the students, but not at a very deep level. Mainly the students I named I feel like I had some sort of a bond with. I think that if I had either been paired with one of them- or another student- or if I could have gone more often, I would have created a deeper connection with them and make more of a difference. I feel like I was able to reach Kenny and let her know that she is capable of doing great things even beyond finishing her math course, and I hope that she feels that way. I think that the kids are better students because of how I helped them. I helped Kenny and the boy next to her figure out word problems that they were having trouble with so that they could later do them on their own. I helped Tommy remember to take strategic notes that would help him more than just writing down every little thing on the webpage. Unfortunately, I think my role as class helper interfered with me being able to be a great mentor because I didn't make as deep connections with the students as I wanted to. However, I also realize that because I was not paired with a student, my job was different.

This experience shaped how I view schools and students. I went to school in a privileged and mainly white community, and I was in all upper level and gifted classes where students took their studies seriously. I had never been in a classroom where a teacher just let a student sleep for the whole class or where the students didn't seem to care about finishing their courses. It

gave me an entirely different scenario to expect for when I become a teacher. Before this, I had only been picturing classes like my AP English classes, but I might not be teaching those. It also made me realize that if I do have a class that acts as disinterested as this one, it might not be my fault. Even though the Classic City kids liked Ms. Knight, they didn't care much more about their work. It made me realize that I cannot change everything or be responsible for everything about my class, and that is okay. I hope that I don't lose my faith in my students though and that I can find ways to incentivize them to finish school.

Based off my experiences at Classic City, I want to have a teaching style that relates to my students. Ms. Knight explained a math concept to a student by relating it to cheating in romantic relationships, and the entire class not only listened, but also understood the concept. The students responded best to Ms. Knight because she could be fun and she understood what was important to them and what was going on in pop culture. Mrs. Scott did not do that, so the kids did not enjoy learning from her as much because they thought that it was boring and that she was strict. I want to be a fun teacher that students might even view as a friend. I want them to look forward to coming to my class and learning.