

My Experience at Classic City High School

Exploring Learning and Teaching

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29 April 2019

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In this report, I will discuss my experience at Classic City High School regarding the institution, the teachers and administrators, and the students. In addition, I will reflect on myself as a mentor, tutor, and future educator.

## **II. THE INSTITUTION**

### **a. Classic City High School Compared to North Gwinnett High School**

Classic City and North Gwinnett, my high school, are run very differently, and it was eye-opening to tutor at such a different institution. Most of the students in my high school were put on a path their freshman year determining what classes they would take until graduation, and the students usually stayed on said path until they graduated. The only time students really strayed from their path was to dual enroll or take a different elective than they initially intended to. In addition, students at my high school focused most of their time on Advanced Placement classes and extracurricular activities, such as Student Council and sports, whereas the students at Classic City are not focused on receiving college credit with the classes they take in high school.

### **b. Structure**

After tutoring/mentoring at Classic City, I could see how the structure of the classes and the institution could benefit some students while harming others. The structure of classes seemed to be very “work at your own pace,” and although that is beneficial for motivated students who aspire to graduate on time and move on from high school to what they have planned next, it can be harmful to students

who are not motivated and students who do not have plans after high school graduation.

**c. Initial Reactions to Classic City High School**

I initially disagreed with the way Classic City functioned. Personally, I am a very hands-on and social learner, and I was in shock that students had to work in front of a computer screen for the entire day. As I kept volunteering and kept showing up to the school, I discovered that the students did not spend the entire day working at their own pace on the computer, and they had class periods that were face-to-face as well as class periods that enabled them to get their own work done. This technique began to grow on me the more I went to Classic City because I saw that students were able to take a good portion of their day at their own pace. This helped in preventing overworking and exhausting the students, I think.

**d. Usefulness of Technology**

Most days I would show up to the school at one o'clock and head straight to Mrs. Johns' classroom, and Mrs. Johns had an online class this period. There were usually between three to eight students in the class, and they were all working on different lessons, quizzes, homework, or tests. This method of teaching grew on me because I saw it beneficial that each student in that classroom could use the hour and a half to work at their own pace to get done what they needed to get done. During one of my visits, I was asked to help a girl build her resume because she needed to complete one before she applied to jobs. She told me she loved the class period we were in because she did not have a computer at home that she could do this on.

### **III. THE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

#### **a. Interactions With The Faculty and Staff of CCHS**

I only had pleasant interactions with the faculty and staff of Classic City. I think the teachers I worked with, specifically Mrs. Johns and Mrs. Stagg, did a great job at forming relationships based on mutual respect with their students. These relationships enabled the students to be patient when they did not understand a concept because they knew the teachers would be there to offer their help.

#### **b. Teacher's Reliance on Technology and Instructional Software**

Like I stated before, the classroom I tutored in most was heavily reliant on technology and instructional software, such as online lessons, quizzes, and tests. Although I did not initially see the benefit of the technology, I began to like it because I saw that the students got to work by themselves, but Mrs. Johns kept the class interactive and attentive by constantly asking questions and offering help.

#### **c. Administrative Role**

The teachers at Classic City play a big role in motivating students to complete their high school degree and potentially move onto college or whatever path is the best fit for them. It was encouraging for me as a future educator to see these teachers take on the responsibility of their students and learn how to individually motivate them. I was at Saturday school this past weekend and I was working with Mrs. Stagg and one of her students, and Mrs. Stagg got onto the student about not wanting to do her work. Mrs. Stagg said to the student, "you know I only fuss because I care and because I know you can do the work if you put your

mind to it.” The two teachers I worked with do a great job at getting to know their students and the ways they feel uplifted and motivated.

#### **IV. THE STUDENTS**

##### **a. Personality**

I consistently tutored two students who we will call Dave and Ben, for security reasons. I worked with Dave every Tuesday and Thursday, and Ben and I worked together the couple of times I tutored at Saturday school. Dave is very quiet and hesitant when it comes to receiving help. He does not ask many questions, and the interests he shared included shoes and basketball. Ben and I had more in common than Dave and I did, but I enjoyed working with both of them. Ben likes to talk through what he is learning and get help from those around him. We did not talk much about his interests, but I do know that he loves math and government. Dave and I are different because I would consider myself outgoing and social, and he is very reserved and to-himself. Ben and I, on the other hand, had more in common because he is receptive to receiving help and willing to learn.

##### **b. Cultural Background**

I do not know any differences between myself and the two students I worked with other than our races and ethnicities. Dave is African American, and Ben is Hispanic. Our cultural backgrounds differ, but I do not know enough specifics about the two individuals to discuss them in comparison to my own background. There was one moment in which I was able to relate a conversation to something I learned in one of the books I read during book club: *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* by Claude Steele. In his book, Steele

discusses stereotypes that affect us and how we either try to “over-effort” to overcome those stereotypes or we settle and let those stereotypes define us. I was helping Dave build his resume one day during class, and I could sense his frustration. He told me that he did not even know if he was “college material” and that building this resume was pointless. He said he did not think he was college material because he had never been told before that he is college material. He let this stereotype of him, whether determined by his race, social class, work ethic, or some other factor, define him as he sat in defeat without confidence in himself.

**c. Educational Experiences**

Both Dave and Ben were students at Clarke Central High School before they came to Classic City, and although neither of them verbalized a strong opposition of the school system, neither of them seemed to love it. They are both sophomores and are both on track for their age, but they were at Classic City for disciplinary reasons. Most days I would come in and Dave would be sitting with his head down on his phone until I went over and offered him help. Ben occasionally complained about tasks he would have to do, but he also completed everything he was given with a little bit of encouragement or motivation.

**V. ME AS A MENTOR, TUTOR, AND FUTURE EDUCATOR**

**a. Mentor**

I feel like the students I worked with began to enjoy my attendance in the classroom because I would help them with their work and spark conversation with them. Dave is the one student I feel like I potentially had an impact on. Like I discussed before, Dave was one of the students I worked with regularly, and he

and I began to bond over things we enjoyed, like sports and clothes. Toward the end of my time at Classic City, he told me he did not know if he planned to attend college or not. I was able to encourage him by suggesting alternative options to a four-year university. For example, I suggested community college, online school, and basketball scholarships. His eyes lit up, and it was clear to me that these were options that had not yet been offered to him. It was exciting for me to hear Dave ask more questions about scholarships and community colleges in the area.

**b. Tutor**

I do feel like my time at Classic City benefited the couple of students I consistently worked with. I got to help them by talking through concepts and lessons they did not fully understand, and I was able to show them new and different approaches to learning and studying. I do not think my role as a tutor got in the way of forming a relationship with the students because they saw me as a friend as well as someone who could potentially help them with concepts they could not grasp.

**c. Future Educator**

My experience at Classic City High School as well as the books I read in my book club this semester has helped me feel more prepared and enthusiastic to be a future educator. Classic City opened my eyes and shed a light on diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, and the work ethic of students within the school. The other two books my group and I presented on were *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Michael William Smith and *For White Folks Who Teach in the*

*Hood... And the Rest of Y'all Too* by Christopher Emdin. In his work, Emdin touches on how administrators should do focus on the importance of learning the culture of their black students rather than implementing rules and guidelines in the classroom that strips these students from their culture and identity. Mrs. Johns knew that she was a racial minority in her classroom: she is white among mostly African American and Hispanic students. I loved that Mrs. Johns related the work her students did to their personal lives because this enabled the students to see the importance of the work rather than the tediousness of it. One of the questions our group asked during our presentation of *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* was "how can we incorporate what the boys are interested in to the mandatory school curriculum?" I was challenged to answer this question multiple times throughout my time at Classic City. For example, one of the days I came in and sat next to Dave who was working on his online economics and business course. I could tell he was confused, but he was disinterested in his work and the help I tried to offer. I could tell my questions were not getting us anywhere, so I paused for a moment and then complimented his shoes (a tactic another student in this course suggested to me). He was wearing high-top Nike basketball sneakers. He thanked me, and I went on asking if he likes basketball. His posture and tone changed as he went on for five or so minutes talking about how much he loves basketball and how he plays with his friends after school all the time. I was able to take this conversation and relate it to his business and economics course. He was doing a lesson about supply and demand, and I explained to him that shoes like his are in high-demand because so many people

want them. After this encounter, Jamond seemed more interested in going through the lesson and finding concepts he could relate to his everyday life. This moment taught me that as a future educator, I can relieve stress and offer help to students when they are struggling academically by relating their lessons to real-life situations, whether it be a student's shoes or a book they like or music they listen to.