

Sean Lantz

Smagorinsky

Service Learning

A Day in the Life of Classic City HS

Background Information

I set out this semester to observe and assist in a Literature class at Classic City. I attended this class Wednesdays, 10:30-12:00. I was placed in the same room as two other mentor students during this time slot. The Literature class was made up of students from 9th and 10th grade, about twelve or thirteen students in all. For privacy reasons, no names will be mentioned in this journal.

Journal Entry #1

I was amazed that the school had such a blend of ability levels. It seemed as if no class was full of just the students that were at that level, but also contained students that had somehow skipped the credit and had to come back for the class. I arrived to the classroom and immediately felt the students become uncomfortable with another person in the room. They were not very keen on being mentored or provided any sort of additional help. Many of the students began to act up in the form of talking loudly and going off-task, but the teacher was very good at getting them to settle down. She told me afterward that they were not usually that bad, and that it would just take some time for them to get adjusted to me and the other two students being in the classroom.

Journal Entry #2

This was the first ‘normal’ day that I saw of the students. They knew that we were coming and were a lot more obedient while we were there. The students were working on reading and answering questions based upon said reading. They were focusing on new words, as well as their ability to predict what would happen next in the story and summarize what had already happened. I noticed the very distinct differences in ability throughout the classroom. Three girls did almost no work at all, instead focusing on makeup and their phones. On the opposite side of the classroom were two boys who were the complete opposite in terms of work ethic. They finished all of their work in minutes and then proceeded to read or listen to music for the remainder of the class.

Journal Entry #3

This week, the school was focusing on an “Anti-Bullying” campaign. The students were all writing anti-bullying papers and nominating one teacher or adult in general who they feel stands in strong opposition to bullying. I was able to walk around and help students think of ideas and then help them with simple mechanics in their papers. By this point, the students had pretty much accept myself and the two other mentors, and no longer seemed uncomfortable with our presence.

Journal Entry #4

The students did some more reading assignments, and I got to see how they incorporated the computer into their lessons. The teacher would read with the students, who identified key

concepts and vocabulary in the reading. After this was done, the students each sat at one of the computers around the room and began to write about what they thought of the story and whether the information within it was something they already knew or completely new information.

Technology in class is always a double-edge sword, since it make assignments like this very easy to complete, but it also allows students to get off-task very quickly. I walked around and noticed that the majority of students were listening to music, and while this is can actually be helpful for their attention, it was still off-task behavior. Some students got done very early and began to play some games on their computers. At this point in the semester, I can very easily see how this class is challenging for some and incredibly dull for others. I would think that it may be more effective if these students were not all grouped together, but more grouped by actual ability in class.

Journal Entry #5

The class was discussing Hawaii today. They read an article about its history and how it became a part of the United States, then did their usual activity of recording what knowledge was new, as well as any good vocabulary words they could find. I finally had a good chance to talk to some of the students and get to know them better. The two boys who usually finish everything early definitely seem to be at a higher level than many of the other students. They typically finish incredibly early, or don't do all of their work because they feel like they already know it all. Some of the students don't feel like they need to learn Literature (which I suppose is a common feeling for some students to have), and so they try to do as little work as possible. The teacher is always aware of both of these issues, however, and is usually pretty quick to correct any problems.

Journal Entry #6

Today's focus was on the Silk Road, and it seemed like the students were pretty engaged with the lesson. I was able to talk to the teacher for a few minutes after class, asking her why she taught and what she enjoyed about teaching, etc. She informed me that she really liked it at Classic City because she could have more of an impact on the students. She felt like, at a regular public school, she wouldn't be able to help as many kids from such diverse and less fortunate backgrounds. She knows that some of the students didn't really want to be there, but she made it her mission to make them engage with the lessons and try their hardest so that maybe they can at least get something out of the class. These all spoke to me, mostly because of the What Keeps Teachers Going book that I read for the service learning class. It really seems like the teacher still has all of the same energy and motivation now as when she first started teaching. As a future teacher, it was really inspiring for me to hear her talk about this, because I very much like the idea of doing whatever I can to try to get through to the students, even when they are trying their hardest to not learn at all.

Journal Entry #7

Today the students talked about Edgar Allen Poe. They read part of "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," then watched a short video on Poe's life. This was the most interested I had seen the students thus far. They seemed very engaged with the lesson and some of them were pretty eager to raise their hand and contribute to the discussion. One of the students was clearly a Poe fan and offered up extra details about some of his other poems. The teacher was a Poe fan herself, and she started talking passionately about her favorite of his poems and what she got out of reading his works. This was the first time that I felt like the teacher, the students, and the

mentors all combined into one cohesive learning group. I felt like I was finally a complete part of the class, and it seemed like the students were completely open to learning and actively wanted to engage in the lesson. It was one of my favorite days so far.

Journal Entry #8

As a complete opposite from last week's entry, the students were incredibly ill-behaved today. I can only attribute their behavior to the closing of the year in a few weeks, because I'm not sure what else it could be. One student had to leave and go to another class because she was causing so much disruption. Two of the students refused to do work or participate in the discussion. Two students (the ones previously mentioned as seeming at a higher level than the course) kept answering all of the teacher's questions and didn't give any other student a chance to answer. The teacher was able to, in a nice way, ask them politely to give the other students a chance to respond to the prompts. Somehow, the teacher was able to get everybody back on task and continue with the lesson. If I only take away one single piece of experience from this, I hope that it is how to appropriately deal with my students without getting upset or frustrated at them, which is a standard that this teacher sets very well.

Journal Entry #9

The time has finally come for the students to start thinking about their end of course exams. This had a few students nervous, but most of them seem fairly confident. I spoke to a few of the students about anxiety, which is one of the books that I had read for the service learning class. The students seemed to appreciate this, and the teacher thought it was useful knowledge for testing. The teacher is very upfront about being there for them if they need anything, and the

students told me that it is really helpful to feel supported. Another teacher stopped by and talked to this classroom's teacher for a moment before noticing myself and the other two mentors. He asked about us and we told him why we were there. He thought that it was a great idea to have outside help, both for the class and for us as upcoming teachers. It made me really optimistic for my future cohorts to see this kind of teamwork and support among the teachers. I wonder if that is common among most schools, or if the fact that this is a more at-risk school encourages the teachers to be more of a combined force.

Journal Entry #10

The last day that I am there was one of the most interesting ones. First, the teacher was on jury duty, so the class had a sub for the day. As is the common thing to do in the event of a sub, the students had busy work and reviews to complete. This led to a complete mixture of chaos, since some of the students were in different grades and were not even taking the same exam for which the other students were supposed to be preparing. Some students had already finished their reviews on a different day, so they just surfed the internet for the entire class. Two students were watching a movie on their computers, while some others were sitting at a table talking. There were only a few students who were actually working on the reviews and studying. Part way through the class, the principal came in and made an announcement about Prom. He told them that the office would send out a verified list of who could attend that upcoming Saturday (kind of short notice, in my opinion), and that the students should remember Prom was a reward, not a right. This seemed to motivate the students a little bit more, because more of them were working on their reviews after this. At the end of class we said goodbye to the students and the sub, finally bidding a farewell to Classic City HS. The semester seemed to really fly by, but I feel like

this experience was definitely something that I will carry into my actual teaching career. I learned a lot about dealing with students, keeping them interested and engaged, and also how to make sure that the students ultimately come first in the school.