

Skylar Martinez

Peter Smagorinsky

LLED 3461

April 29, 2019

My Experience at Classic City

*Students names have been changed

When finding out that we had to volunteer at Classic City High School, I was very excited to work with the age group I ideally want to work with after getting my degrees. When Professor Smagorinsky described what type of high school this was and the students who attended it I knew exactly what type of environment I would be in. I was still just as excited as before because I felt confident in how to relate with the students. I went to high school with similar students and I also come from a not so picture perfect background.

On my first day, I entered the school and thought how strange it was to have a high school connected to other county offices. When I walked in I had to be buzzed into the office and was met by a very nice secretary. I then entered the main part of the school that was just one hallway. To me, this was so different given that I came from a high school with almost 2,000 students. Ms. Smith walked me to Ms.Kaiser's 12th grade English class my first day and there was a substitute teacher there. The classroom was pretty typical with desks, desktop computers lining the walls and a whiteboard up front. On that first day, a student named Journey explained to me that Ms. Kaiser hasn't been to school in a long time and they only have substitute teachers who don't really know what to do besides follow Ms.Kasier's lesson plans. I felt bad for these students because they didn't have a sense of stability at school and when I was growing up, one

of the only stable places I had was school. So, knowing how inconsistent this classroom would be the next week I asked Ms. Smith if I could switch to another class and she suggested Ms. Johns 10th grade English class. I just wanted to be able to successfully be able to help these students and in that classroom, I felt as if that was not going to be possible. After that, I was placed in a more stable classroom and was able to get direction from Ms. Johns during the rest of my time at Classic City.

Ms. Johns is a very attentive and patient teacher. She attended Piedmont College and the University of Georgia. I can tell she truly cares about her students and their success. She is not a pushover teacher but she is very flexible which I think is a great attribute she possess when dealing with students. At the beginning of each class, she would go around the room and check where each student was in their course work and asked each student if they needed anything from her in order to be successful for the day. Her personality is very approachable and she allowed her classroom to be a safe space for students to air out anything that was bothering them; it didn't matter if it had to do with their course work or not. Ms. Johns explained to me that if they can't have a place to comfortably express their issues then they will not be completely focused on their course work. She was extremely open to feedback from me and we often had conversations about literature she was about to teach in class. I often suggested books to her that her students might feel more connected to because the books I recommended were books that were well perceived in my high school that I attended and the demographics of Classic City and my high school are very similar.

The class period I attended was an online class period which means the students in this class spend their entire time on the desktops completing classes. During this period there is a

max of about seven students and each of them are doing their own coursework. Some will be doing English, Science, Economics, and some electives. The computers they had weren't the best and sometimes a student would have to switch computers because theirs wouldn't be working that day. The computer program the school used for these online courses was not the best either and was very boring and un motivating. I worked with a boy named Jay and he was completing a business course when I arrived this semester. I would often sit with him and see how he navigated through the course. He barely ever read the pages and pages of notes that came with the course. Instead, he would create a notes column within the program and he would copy and paste all the bolded terms from the pages of notes and place them within his own online "notebook" which he could reference back to during tests, quizzes, and assignments. Jay had noticed the types of questions that would be asked on the test and quizzes so he knew what information to put in his notebook. The assignments that came with the course is where I felt the real learning came from. Although Jay dreaded these assignments I knew this is where he learned the most and that's why I always encouraged him to do his best to finish these assignments. The assignments often led Jay to do some type of real-world analysis of business. This forced Jay to look up companies and find out more about them and how they worked. To make the assignments seem like less work I always encouraged him to look up a company he buys from. One example would be when I noticed he had an iPhone so I suggested him to investigate how much the cost of the raw materials was to make his phone. He was so shocked to find out that his phone only cost around \$250 to make yet he paid much more than that to have that phone. To see him learn a concept and apply it to his life was so exciting and rewarding to me as a tutor.

Coming into this school I was so excited to work with older students. After graduating, I want to work at a high school. Thus, being able to work with students in the age range I want to teach was such a treat. Since Classic City is such a small school I wasn't overwhelmed by the students and I enjoyed the opportunity to have one-on-one time with the students. Being a future educator, I believe this experience helped solidify the idea that I wanted to work with older children. The student I often assisted, Jay was a go with the flow type of individual. While I was there he never got in trouble, however, he was very unmotivated. He shared with me the only reason he came to school was because his mother made him. I could also tell he really was not motivated much by anything else either. Since I was helping him complete his business course there was a lot of talk about the job field. I asked him one day while he was completing an assignment if he was getting a summer job and he told me no, he was just going to chill at home. I thought this was very different from me when I was his age, around 16, I was so excited to get my first job and have my own money but for Jay, this did not motivate him. I wish I had more time with him to find out what did motivate him.

The time spent at Classic City was time well spent, however seeing the limited resources this school had was quite upsetting. For a school that relies so heavily on technology, it seems they haven't upgraded or repaired most of the technology on campus. I also see the books that are offered to the English teachers most of them are beaten up and they often don't have a full class set. Knowing that the neighboring county of Athens, Oconee, have some of the nicest and newest facilities and resources because of white flight infuriates me. I came from a school similar to this, we got all the hand-me-downs from the white schools in the county and the white schools got all the new computers, laptops, and textbooks. I never really noticed these

differences until reading Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. After reading the book I discovered that money for schools comes from property tax and a lot of Athens property is government housing which leads to a deficit in money for schools and resources.

To draw things to a close, I saw the time I spent at Classic City as very valuable. I wished I had more time in my week to mentor there and to truly get to know all the students more. I would love to go back to the school and volunteer. The teachers and staff are some of the most caring and patient people I have met in the education field. While I was there, I learned that not everyone is going to be as motivated as me but it's my job as a future educator to get to know my students and find out what motivates them to succeed.