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LLED 3461S
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Classic City, Remarkable Experience

As I sit and reflect on my time well spent at Classic City High School, I am left with fond memories of my mentee. I consider myself fortunate to have tutored my mentee, as she did not fit the conventional profile of a Classic City High student. She was not a delinquent who skipped school or had a long history of discipline problems, nor was she a student who had been retained within a particular grade. However, she was a bright, young lady with vast dreams. Heading into Classic City, I remember feeling mixed emotions. I was excited to finally begin work within a high school (no longer elementary or middle grades), in preparation for the birth of my teaching career in August; yet, I considered others' outside opinion, especially my family. My family worried about the behavioral issues possibly present within this school and the erratic attendance of the students. However, now at the ending of my time at Classic City, I can reflect on my positive experience and the interconnectivity of my tutoring days with our class discussions.

Upon entering Classic City on the very first day, I was immediately cognizant of the demographics. The school's population is mostly minoritized groups, aligning with the first and third books my group discussed regarding white privilege. Many of the students stem from varying backgrounds, mostly rooted in poverty and unfortunate circumstances. In this, some students bounce from home to home or have unstable living conditions, including doubts about their next meal. Many students lack the motivation to continue school, let alone strive for high achievements. Furthermore, many of these students share a common, negative opinion regarding college and higher education. As I waited for Mrs. Mimi to process my paperwork and pair me with a teacher, millions of thoughts flashed through my mind. She led me to an English teacher's

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classroom and I felt eyes immediately swarm in on me. Although I identify as African-American, I worried that my lighter skin complexion would give off a different perception. In this, I feared the students identifying me as white or any other race, thus unable to “relate” to their lives and daily struggles. However, the students’ reception of me was positive, especially my mentee whom I will address as “Cee” for confidentiality purposes. I happened to be standing beside her desk waiting for Mrs. Mimi to fill “Mr. S” in on my role within his classroom when Cee took initiative and spoke to me first. Surprised, but relieved, I began conversing with her about the assignment she was working on and her basic information (i.e. name) and we instantly connected. At that moment, I realized that these students do not deserve the label traditionally placed upon them, nor someone unwilling to listen to them or realize their individual uniqueness. Essentially, I strove to be the gateway for Cee to share her personal and scholastic problems.

Upon first meeting Cee, I did not immediately question her placement within Classic City High School. I understood the importance of steady, weekly attendance in order to increase her comfort level with me. As minoritized groups, there is a common attitude that school is unimportant and reaps no ultimate benefits. These students feel they are already pre-disadvantaged (mainly because of their skin color and home environment), thus lacking the motivation to regard school as essential. Many of these students share this viewpoint, especially towards English. These students, including Cee, are uninterested in English and see no connection to the future pathways they plan to take. For instance, Cee shared with me that her dream career was a nurse and that her favorite subject was math. At first, I fretted because I wondered how I could possibly show her not only the importance, but beauty, of English and its interconnectivity with math. At that moment, I shared with her that although she did not like the

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system (i.e. required English courses), it was only temporary. This led into our discussion of college, involving more freedom in choosing courses and a heavier concentration on areas of academic interest. I told her college involved networking and social connections, an aspect that many minoritized groups feel discouraged and disadvantaged. Here, I inserted my own personal experience and let her know that I understand her fears, but that it was definitely possible to excel as a minoritized student. I stem from a Title I high school, similar to both Clarke Central and Classic City. The area I grew up within is not heavily equipped with resources and almost all of the school's population receives free/reduced lunch. Yet, I was determined to rise above my circumstances, leading to my enrollment with UGA. Thereby, I encouraged her to continue working hard and that just attending college alone is a huge achievement, even if it is not UGA.

As the weeks progressed, I learned more and more about Cee. She shared her progress in her classes. She was a student who attended Classic City for a half-day, returning to Clarke Central for lunch and dismissal. I learned that Cee attended Classic City by choice, unlike the bulk of her classmates and/or friends. She shared that she did not enjoy English and history, thereby choosing to study these subjects outside of her home school. She could not fathom spending an entire year studying the same/similar English topics. She elected to attend Classic City to study these same subjects at her own pace, sometimes fast and sometimes slow. She wanted to complete multiple assignments and lessons within one day, as opposed to spending weeks on a subject of no interest to her. Although she is currently only a junior, she was able to finish the 11th grade course and begin work on the 12th grade curriculum. Seeing her high and quick achievement, and also playing a crucial role in this progression, helped to reaffirm my purpose as a future educator. Upon learning her placement at Classic City, I could not find fault.

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This was perhaps one of the only moments when I felt out of place with Cee. We shared similar familial and school backgrounds, the same race identification, and we both loved watching the hit tv show: Scandal. Yet, I never personally experienced disliking a subject so much that I chose to attend a school originally designed for other student types and purposes. However, I chose to use this as a learning moment. In my African-American poetry class of this semester, one of the most salient points my professor emphasized involved Langston Hughes' poem: Theme for English B. My professor ultimately stressed the importance of the future educators within the class (myself and 2 other of my classmates) in allowing yourself to sometimes switch roles with your students, thus being open to changes and learning from their differing experiences. Classic City provided the perfect platform to practice his advice, as I shared many things in common with the students, but I also still had a slightly different experience throughout school.

Aside from academics, I appreciated Cee becoming more comfortable with me into sharing her personal life. There were days where she came talking nonstop about her boyfriend and her relationship bumps. Throughout everything, I remained neutral and served solely as a listener, both protecting myself legally and also providing support and a listening ear. Her discussions of her boyfriend transformed into her excitement about prom. Seeing her prom pictures in April was one of the highlights of my time spent with her. I was able to see her dolled and enjoying herself outside of school.

I tutored on Tuesday mornings, but I still appreciated the Wednesday schedule that "Mr. S" implemented in the class. Wednesdays were independent reading days for students, allowing them to bring any sort of reading material to occupy the hour long class period. This sort of classroom structure aligned with my group's 2nd book discussion; the book was titled, "Out of

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This World: Why Literature Matters to Girls”. The book addressed the different literature categories that adolescent girls enjoy reading and their reasons. This was one of the times when Cee seemed semi-interested in English because she was able to choose her reading materials. “Mr. S” allowed students to read literally any genre, ranging from magazines to novels to comic strips. I personally relished this because students were given options and received personal gratification from their reading. I also appreciated reading this novel because it tied into my weekly experience at Classic City.

All in all, my time at Classic City was well spent. I grew not only as a future educator, but also as a person. Mentoring Cee allowed me to delve into her experience and my own by addressing both our similarities and differences. I was surprised but relieved that my coursework and book readings closely mirrored some of the same issues I faced within the classroom. My most fond memory involved helping Cee and two other students prepare for the Georgia Milestone examination. In this, I was able to transform my skills and English background into a real-life example, assisting students with grammar and writing skills exercises. Thereby, my experience at Classic City allowed me a firsthand glimpse at life within the classroom, but also life outside of the classroom as well, something I will cherish for the rest of my life.