

Tung Nguyen

Dr. Smagorinsky

LLED 3461S

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Classic City High School Report

Introduction: Starting February 3, 2016, I volunteered as a tutor and mentor at Classic City High School; I came in on Wednesdays each week from 12:15 to 1:45 PM. I worked as a tutor in Ms. Jenson's¹ E2020 class, helping students to finish their English homework such as online reviews, quizzes, and tests that were to be completed via the computer. Although I occasionally worked with other students in Ms. Jenson's class, I mainly tutored and mentored a student named Michael. The following is my field experience report after tutoring at Classic City High School for 11 weeks.

The Institution: After having volunteered at Classic City High School prior to my field experience there this semester, I was not necessarily surprised by the heavy prevalence of technology that the students were exposed to when having to complete most of their work through the school's online program. Since I was now much more familiar with the school's space and surroundings, I was better prepared to observe the effectiveness that the online program had on the students. For my second time volunteering at Classic City High School, I found the program – while simple, convenient, and efficient – to be quite tedious and un-engaging for the students. At least for English, Classic City's online program really consists of

¹ Real names have been redacted from this report and replaced with fake names in order to conceal the individuals' identities.

nothing but a short reading passage (longer passages such as book chapters are linked externally) and a set of multiple-choice questions that students are to answer after having read the excerpt. The program's layout is very simple, presenting a plain passage of text before listing the answer choices below. The next question is reached by simply clicking on the next page of the quiz; a typical quiz to be completed in one sitting is usually 10 questions. While certainly a straight forward and non-distracting form of work for students, I found this type of set-up to be too simple, offering very little engagement or motivation for the students to learn. Even when lessons contained active videos, the content of the videos seemed to solely focus on giving out information rather than helping to engage the students with the material. As a result, students mostly mindlessly pushed through their online lessons and quizzes because there did not seem to be any greater purpose for completing their work other than being able to move on from it.

While from reading this analysis it might seem that I am against the heavy use of media to learn, as a homeschooled student who studied from junior to high school solely through a DVD-based program, I am actually fairly supportive of different ways to teach students, even through technology. I just do not believe that the particular *design* of Classic City's online program necessarily helped to engage students – I found there to be a general great lack of engagement and motivation among students due to the program's very simplistic and informational approach to learning English, especially in regard to reading.

In order to resolve this problem, I would recommend improving the school's online program by adding more variety to its lessons and quizzes, as well as provide some much needed context to the material to help students be more motivated to learn. One of the reasons I enjoyed my DVD program so much throughout high school was because the lectures were actually pre-recorded lessons given by real teachers in a real classroom over the course of a school year.

Having real teachers instruct the students really helped to differentiate the lessons a bit more for me and establish some relationship between me and the material when my teachers added some context surrounding the texts we were reading. A much more colorful and engaging layout overall or perhaps a physical reading pamphlet would also add some variety and context to the texts and authors students had to read about at Classic City High School (my school also included textbooks along with our needed-to-be-watched DVDs).

Besides the school's computer program, the prevalence of technology also existed via frequent student use of their personal phones. Throughout my time volunteering at Classic City, I think it was obvious that the student "proportion owning smartphones" has definitely "increased dramatically" across the years as I saw many students freely carrying around and talking on their smartphones (unlike me, who does not even own a cellphone) (Englander 94). Although the class for which I volunteered did not seem to be heavily addicted to their cellphones and "unable to function without cellphones in hand" – unlike the last time I had volunteered at Classic City – there did seem to be a student "reluctance to put them [their cellphones] down, even for a moment" (158). Despite their self-control and compliance to put away their phones and stay on task, I do think it was obvious that students would rather be surfing the Wi-Fi on their phones than learning; Michael occasionally would often look at or check his phone for updates. Overall, I think that the students were not addicted to cellphone use and were generally over the novelty of phones and having them in the classroom; distractions were usually more the result of them preferring to check their phones than to study. I do believe that frequent vocal reminders by the teacher to stay on task helped students to remember to keep their phones away and focus on their studies.

The Teachers and Administrators: I thought that the teachers and administrators at Classic City High School were generally prepared, knowledgeable, helpful, and pleasant. I particularly noticed how Ms. Jenson, who did not directly teach the students while I was present, had a very open and candid relationship with her students. Ms. Jenson established expertise and trust by being frequently available for student questions or providing needed assistance. She often had snacks around and offered them to students, thus establishing her amiable and caring attitude toward them. What I found especially surprising was how Ms. Jenson, a white teacher, was able to openly discuss or joke along with her students, who were mostly black or Spanish, about racial or cultural differences. I believe her openness about her lack of complete understanding of her students' cultures helped them to feel more secure and welcome within her classroom. While I personally do not have a problem with stereotypical jokes based on race or culture, I did find that such jokes between Ms. Jenson and her students did at first make me feel a bit uncomfortable because I was not yet familiar with the class and sure if Ms. Jenson had established such an open environment with her students. The students' positive and jovial responses to Ms. Jenson's conversation, however, assured me that the banter between her and them was not a problem at all, showing me it is perfectly fine to discuss sensitive matter like race as long as there is a proper "larger context of interpretation" already established within a teacher's classroom (Low 129).

The Students: While I tutored a few students in Ms. Jenson's class, I mostly worked with a student named Michael throughout my time at Classic City. Michael was an Afro-Hispanic male student. He spoke fluent English and Spanish and enjoyed slice of life books, especially those

dealing with LGBTQ, and the hip hop artist Fetty Wap (he wanted to go to Fetty Wap's recent concert at UGA, but did not end up going).

In regard to his personality, Michael differed from me in many aspects, especially in relation to my more quiet and reserved demeanor. Michael was very outgoing and sociable; relationships between him and his classmates were very amiable, and he had no trouble fitting in with the other students. Michael's great sense of humor also made him very likeable to his classmates, his teacher, and myself, a trait that, besides being outgoing and friendly, most likely helped him to immediately fit in with others, become part of the class, and not feel left out. Only occasionally would Michael get into small, petty disputes with the other students; they would aggressively tease and sometimes briskly hit each other. The other students' unhindered, instant, or witty responses to Michael during these interactions, however, quickly convinced me as a carefully monitoring tutor that such interactions were just playful fun and not a cause of concern for bullying due to their lack of a "power imbalance," "repeated occurrence," or "intentionality" (Englander 16).

Educationally, Michael was a very good reader and possessed great comprehension skills, at least as far as English was concerned. Michael would frequently choose the correct answer (or the second best one) after reading the presented passage and question before I would check his answer. It was clear, however, that Michael found the online assignments tedious at times; he would often not watch, skip, or skim through videos he did not have to see and responded haphazardly to quizzes that would not count toward his grade – generally for the sake of quickly getting on to the next assignment. Michael especially often avoided having to read long passages for his quizzes and would often tell me that he did not read the book or longer chapter for a particular assignment in advance; instead, he would at times rely more heavily on his analytical

abilities to solve a reading question. Michael's problem with reading long passages mostly stemmed from tedious and long assignments; he would occasionally complain about how long a reading passage was and never mentioned how he felt disconnected from the text for cultural or any other reasons. I think that Michael's distaste for reading assignments, especially longer ones, clearly shows how people and students in general are "not designed for thinking" (Willingham 3) and that the "difficulty" of a task is a very important point of keeping a person "interested" and motivated to work in school (12). Despite how the "content" of Michael's reading assignment were certainly tedious and somewhat dry, I also believe that not having any higher payback than getting a good grade and hopefully moving on to the next lesson, while prompting, was not very rewarding to the his life as a whole (12). While I do not necessarily have a problem with students mindless working through material as long as they understand what they are doing, I would hope that students can learn more than just the needed terms or fundamentals involved with a reading assignment; I believe that also recognizing the values and purpose of a story through its context is important to student development and meaningful to their lives. I believe that the school's set-up for their online program slightly hindered that process for Michael by not offering good enough content and stakes.

Me as a Teacher: Coming from my previous tutoring experiences, I think I have become much more comfortable working with students as a whole. Looking back to my field experience with Ms. Jenson's class, I feel like I have improved by becoming less pedantic in my approach (as in I am much more calm, less nervous, and not too rigid in my instruction) and by having more sociable communication with my mentees. As a tutor, I felt that, while I could explain the readings and English concepts well to my students, I had a hard time communicating things

indirectly involved to their learning processes. I especially had a hard time finding ways to encourage Michael to read the longer passages included on his assignments because I really wanted him to read because he wanted to; I felt that pushing too hard for him to read when he was clearly mentally bored could potentially make him not want to read at all and find the assignment even more tedious. When longer passages were included, Michael and I would generally work through them analytically; at most I would encourage him to read the first and last parts of a long passage to get an idea of what he was reading. This method seemed to at least get him going on tackling longer excerpts, but was not fully effective. Perhaps if I was not a tutor but was a teacher with more authority I would have felt better about encouraging him a little harder on completing these readings and explaining to him the benefit of reading a longer passage of writing.

As a mentor, however, I think I succeeded very well in providing Michael with a supportive study buddy and role model. Michael and I had a very good relationship; he would often greet me and ask me to work with him on his online homework and Ms. Jenson would tell me how much Michael asked her about whether I would be coming in or not on Wednesday. While I did not have any profound discussions with Michael or feel like I strongly influenced him personally in any way, I do believe that my effort and willingness to communicate and listen to him, as well as ask questions, made a small difference in Michael's motivation to learn, no matter how I was tutoring. I think my simply arriving on time to his class every week and being willing to sit down and work with him encouraged Michael to stay on his study path and work as well; he seemed to really appreciate my presence and willingness to work beside him more than anything else I could have done to help him. I think such an observation illustrates how any student's impression of or attachment to school or learning is first and foremost "emotional"

(Willingham 186). It is therefore very important for teachers to have a caring attitude toward and express confidence in their students in order for learners to gain the motivation and focus they need to participate in their academics.

Conclusion: As a future educator, I would really like to keep building on my communication skills to reach other students, especially those related to classroom management. I would also like to maintain my willingness and caring attitude toward students in helping them to learn, since this point seems to be one of the most effective ways when trying to reach students. Like Ms. Jenson, I would like to establish a very open and respectful relationship between me and my students, making sure that I have clear guidelines for proper verbal context and interpretation when discussing more controversial topics. I would also like to provide more effective ways for students to learn via media through more varied and engaging content. After having taken LLED 3461S, I have thoroughly enjoyed tutoring at Classic City High School and hope to effectively apply what I have learned over this semester to my future teaching carrier.

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LLED 3461S Sign-In Sheet

Name: Tung Nguyen

Supervisor: Ms. Mimi Middendorf

Contact Info:

middendorf@clarke.k12.ga.us

Date	Hours	Student/Experience	Signature	
02/03	90 mins.	Maikel		
02/10	90 mins.	Maikel		
02/17	90 mins.	Observed.		
03/02	90 mins.	Observed.		
03/16	90 mins.	Maikel		
03/23	90 mins.	Maikel		
03/30	90 mins.	Jennifer, Maikel		
04/06	90 mins.	Maikel		
04/13	90 mins.	Maikel		
04/20	90 mins.	Jennifer		
04/27	90 mins.	Maikel		
				Thanks!