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Classic City High School is an alternative high school that is on Evans Street, branching off of Atlanta Highway. The school is for students who want to get their high school diploma early, want to get their GED, or need to catch up on high school work and need a program that can let them go at their own pace. The school has a total of 126 students in grades 9-12 with students’ age ranging from 15-22. The school has 1% Asian, 60.32% African American, 12.7% Hispanic, 0.79% multiple race, and 25.4% white students. Its population below poverty level is 24.51%, and there were no fees in place of which I was aware. As Classic City is a public school, it receives funding from the government, and their students have the option of having a free or reduced lunch based on an online application they had to submit for it.

The classroom where I tutored was an English class for students in the 11th grade, so the subject was world literature with a mix of American literature. The demographics of the school reflected the students in this particular classroom, but it was rare I ever saw all of the students together. The students often had a hard time coming to class because there was not a strict attendance policy in place; usually the only punishment students got was when they were tardy to class, which would result in detention. Many students expressed that they would rather have an absence on their record than a tardy; this thinking, however, could be one of the factors that makes it so that Classic City High School is in the 99th percentile of school rankings, earning it a grade of F in 2010. In
2012, only 46% of their students were at or exceeding in the annual EOCTs (Movoto, 2015).

The first day I went to classes, however, I did not know all of these statistics. The teacher of the classroom where I tutored assigned a student, Andricus, to me as she put her arm around him and pointed to me, saying, “This is your key to graduation.” Naturally, I felt a lot of pressure after that, but I think that this pressure helped propel me to push harder if I ever found teaching the students particularly difficult. The school’s classes are mainly online so that students may work at their own respective paces. Their English lectures start with a pre-test that lets them bypass the lecture if they score 70% or above on the test. Often the lectures themselves could take up to an hour depending on the activities included in them, so often I found myself teaching the students material I have not seen since high school as we went through the pre-tests to make the best of our time while also learning efficiently. I would either have 1 or 2 students at a time, usually the same ones, and I would help them with their language arts and literature course, or, as the website called it, E2020. Their lectures consisted of subjects like punctuation, Greek mythology, American Indian literature, World War II literature, lectures on resumes and cover letters, and anything in between. Since the students worked online, they had access to music websites like Pandora, and unless it hindered the students’ work, I often let them listen to their music.

I often found that letting one of my students, Tydarius, an African American, listen to Pandora actually helped him work better. One of his favorite Pandora stations was a rap station, and after hearing him complain about a few poems he had to read, I informed him that R.A.P. actually stands for rhythm and poetry. After that, he became a
bit more interested and invested in his work since he knew that it could be similar to the
music he was listening to. One of the books I read this semester for class, *Feel These
Words: Writing in the Lives of Urban Youth*, discusses promoting students’ cultures and
not stifling it. I tried to practice this concept with Ty in this aspect of his learning since
rap is a music genre created by African Americans, and let it enhance his learning. I
encouraged my student’s music and culture in it instead of pushing it away.

Another concept from the book discussed different languages and dialects within
the United States that are different from Standard English. Specifically, the book
discussed the Ebonics Debate of 1996. Though Ebonics is a language spoken by many
African Americans, American schools are taught primarily in Standard English. The
debate in question was whether there should be English classes specifically for those
students who speak Ebonics. Many teachers believe that this would benefit students
because Standard English is the language spoken by our dominant society, and often
assimilating with the majority’s culture yields more opportunities for students.

I found at Classic City High, a few of the students I tutored often spoke in
Ebonics. I only occasionally had a little trouble when instructing them or asking them
questions during lectures, and it was never enough to get in the way of teaching.
However, while Ty could rap the lyrics to a song with ease, sometimes if he had to recite
a poem that was written in Standard English, he would have more trouble with that.
While Ty, an honestly bright and hard-working student, at times had trouble with lectures
because the language was not one he primarily spoke growing up, I never had a tough
time at his age with Language Arts lectures. This made me consider the Ebonics debate
more. If my student had some trouble reading a short poem, does that mean he would
also have trouble in the professional world? Not having a program that helps students speak Standard English could be a factor that affects any gaps in learning that may come about from our dominant culture being the center of school teaching.

As said in Out of This World: Why Literature Matters to Girls, “one never reads except by identification” (Blackford, 4). Most often, my students would express a dislike for reading; in fact, it often was their least favorite subject. One reason for this could be either the language of books, referencing my earlier paragraph on Ebonics, or it could be because my students rarely see themselves in their assigned writings. They often told me that they liked reading until high school, where they are often assigned literature that are primarily written by people whose ethnicity is different from theirs. All students should be able to see people like themselves in assigned readings; this has the potential to bring about more interest in reading as well as validate them in schools. Also being patient with students who might have trouble reading at the same pace as the rest of the class could be helpful; one of the best things about the layout of Classic City’s lectures online is that they help students work at their own pace. In another book we read in class, Born on a Blue Day, the author expressed that he probably would not have been so successful in life if his teachers were not so patient with him. The author’s autism often hindered his school lessons because he often either would learn much more quickly than students or he would be very behind. With the help of his teachers, however, he “never felt self-conscious or embarrassed at lagging behind the other children” (Tammet, 37).

While tutoring, sometimes between lectures I would find myself talking with my student about his or her life and what he or she wanted to do in the future. One of my students, Alexis, who happened to be Ty’s half sister, told me that she wanted to pursue
nursing for two reasons: she wanted to help people, and she wanted to become wealthy. While her reasoning is valid as well as a bit honorable, it shows that she knew that wealth in life would not be given to her; she would have to earn it. I got a sense that she was hoping to climb the socioeconomic ladder after high school ended, and she wanted to do so by becoming a nurse. However, she also expressed concerns regarding college expenses. This shows me that she has knowledge of how wealth works. Even thought one’s income can be comfortable, her wealth could be low because of student loans or car payments. However, this knowledge is a step in the right direction; she knows that an education, though expensive, is her key to climbing that metaphorical ladder.

The students’ teacher was always helpful if I ever needed guidance or if I felt it prudent to report on the students’ progress. Once, I tutored a girl named Jameka, and I sensed that she was having trouble with the technology that went into the classes at Classic City High. She told me it was only her second week there, and she was more used to the face-to-face lectures that one would normally discover in an eleventh grade English classroom. So, after our tutoring session, I talked to her teacher to discuss whether she should be moved to a face-to-face classroom. Ms. McNyre was immensely helpful; she discussed ways in which I could engage Jameka in her lesson. Also, she told me that if any problems persisted, we could move her to a class for which she would be better suited. Ms. McNyre’s helpfulness showed how much she cared about the students and their learning; I also noted how she always would ask the students how they are right before class started and how she genuinely cared about their lives. She is a model teacher; the environment she set up for her students was one that promoted learning no shame at asking questions.
My time at Classic City High School was short but sweet. I immensely enjoyed being able to come into class and helping the students out with their work. The students were almost always ready to learn, and hearing them tell me about themselves was also a great way to ease them into becoming more open with me in regards to any confusion in their lectures. I have found in the past that often, since I am so close in age with the students I tutored, I might come off as being patronizing when teaching a student as opposed to being helpful. Asking questions and being comfortable enough to ask questions is one of the most integral parts of learning; if one of my students did not ask any questions, how would I know if he is learning or not? Hearing my students discuss any discrepancies they had in their work with me helped me as much as it did them; I now am more acclimated to discussing and teaching students in a way that engages both of us, and I will definitely remember this as I continue on my journey to become a teacher.
Reference List


