

Daniel Bell

Observation/Site Visit with Reflection #2 – ED Classroom

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EDTE 629: Teaching Students with LD or ED

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The School

The Pathways Schools at Northwood, 1200 University Blvd., West, Silver Spring, MD 20902, 301-593-8680. This school is based out of Northwood Presbyterian Church. There are 24 students total. The student population is mostly ED, but there are some LD as well. The class I observed was all ED. From what I could tell, the student body was almost entirely African-American, with the exception of a few Hispanics.

Pathways handles many different types of ED including severe anxiety, depression, PDD, Aspergers, ODD, Bi-Polar, and PTSD. The school is a non-public institution that only accepts students financed by the district; no private pay students. Most students complete a high school diploma, though some can only complete an attendance certificate. The students are all on IEPs and on the Point Sheet Management System.

The Teacher

Ms. Stukes, African-American, 30's. Calm, sweet demeanor. Very friendly. Very engaged and involved with students. Very articulate and spoke on students' level. Obviously quite experienced.

The Class/Students

6 students, all African-American, 2 females, 4 males. Lots of verbal outbursts – usually ignored by teacher and other students. One student had an Aid, Ms. Cosby. One student would lean back in his chair and would lean back his desk while tapping his pen – usually ignored by teacher and class unless it got too distracting when someone else was trying to speak.

Environment

Room was small, cozy. Teacher's desk in front. Whiteboard in front. Student desks spaced apart in two rows. The room was covered ceiling to floor with related posters, word charts, word banks, student work, student artwork, and books on bookshelves. The environment was warm and inviting, which partly, I'm sure, can be attributed to the fact that this classroom resides in a church.

The Lesson

Began with a prefix warm-up. Then did a review of HSA words on a multiple-choice worksheet.

Next, Ms. Stukes read an excerpt from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* and the students had to stop Ms. Stukes when they came across certain key words from the board and the class had to highlight.

As the reading came to close, Ms. Stukes assigned a short answer question from the worksheet for homework.

Observations/Notes

Very first thing, as students filtered in, Ms. Stukes drew positive attention to the students who were immediately focused and doing their warm-up. She did this continuously as more and more students settled down to work.

Stukes had me introduce myself, which actually worked out well because the students, who were previously constantly shooting glances at me and asking me questions about my computer, pretty much just ignored me after that point.

Ms. Stukes provided me with some of the handouts (attached), which seemed like a good idea for the students consistency by making me part of the class so they wouldn't get distracted by my presence.

Ms. Stukes was every engaged with the students. She never sat behind her desk while she taught; she was always walking amongst the desks, she'd pat the students when they'd do well, and she would give praise every time a student would give an effortful answer or otherwise do well. Never negative or accusatory or sarcastic.

She was very good at bringing down tension: she would sometimes ask a question and while someone was trying to answer, another would interrupt, which would aggravate the first student and Ms. Stukes would immediately redirect their attention to the topic and keep them on task before the student/student tension got to a breaking point.

When a discussion would venture off task that involved several students, Ms. Stukes would stop everything and be very clear about the fact that the class was off task and it needed to get back on.

When a student gave an obvious incorrect answer and would be self-conscious about it, she would never tell them that they were wrong, only that they were on the path to the correct answer. Wow!

Students were allowed to get up occasionally to check a word in a textbook, get a writing utensil, and go to the restroom. This would sometimes be a bit distracting to the rest of the class, though Ms. Stukes most often got them right back on track.

One student in particular (who would lean back his desk and chair) seemed to have a moderate outburst issue. He "hated writing," declared that he was done with his assignment when obviously not done, and would tap whatever he had in his hand against his desk. To try and subside these behaviors, Ms. Stukes spent a lot of time beside his desk, using it as a sort of base-station to teach. She would read off of his paper (instead of her own) when teaching and was there to give him visual and physical cues when he'd get particularly off track.

Instead of pointing out specific bad behavior, Ms. Stukes would let either the student or the class know that they were being disrespectful. Otherwise, she'd bring more attention to the times when students were exemplifying appropriate or good behavior/involvement.

As the class came to a close the students gathered around Ms. Stukes's desk to hand in their class work and have their point sheets filled out.

Criticisms/Suggestions

I really don't have any. As this was my first foray into the world of ED, I have little experience regarding the running of an ED classroom. Regardless, Ms. Stukes handled this class phenomenally well and all I can do at this point in my career is praise her for her patience, dedication, and experience.

My only real suggestion would just be to make sure that the student with the tapping compulsion has minimal exposure to anything that he can bang on his desk; perhaps only give him a pencil when he needs to write.

What I Learned

Change can be distracting for ED students, even an upheaval for some. Like my unexpected presence in their classroom. I see that they need consistency and constant support.

I also found that these ED students were quickly self-conscious and easily offended by their peers. They rarely became upset with Ms. Stukes (I don't know how anyone could!), but there was a lot of unnecessary tension between the classmates, which I didn't find to be personal. A couple of students would sometimes unnecessarily shout at anyone that attempted to interject during discussions.

I can see that ED students most likely often thrive in an individual or one-on-one basis. It appears that, because of their fragile emotional state, that most anyone, even if completely benign, can be a source of negativity to an ED student, especially if the person is not a constant in the student's life.

I also found the students to be largely lacking many basic interpersonal skills that we often take for granted. But part of Pathways Schools' mission statement is that they believe that their students can change, so there seems to be hope that this is not always a terminal disorder.

Lastly, I found that working with ED students requires a huge amount of patience, tolerance, and understanding, not to mention experience, which I could tell Ms. Stukes had a lot of. I, on the other hand, was honestly horrified at the thought of standing in front of these students with my current experience. I now more fully realize and understand that the behavioral issues that I deal with at Chelsea are miniscule compared with what I could be dealing with. Kudos to teachers of ED kids!