

## **Classroom Observation Report**

### **Part A: Exploring the Achievement Gap (100pts)**

#### **1) Introduction**

The Achievement Gap is the academic disparity among white middle class students and that of minority and those of lower socioeconomic status. This is an incredible concern because if students in low income areas perform worse, they will go into the community unable to make significant amounts of money, meaning their kids will then perform worse in school, leading to a perpetual cycle of low economic status and academic achievement. This also has an influence on minority area's access to health care because if less people from those areas are going to school to be doctors, dentists, nurses and such, then there will be a lower amount of people who are willing to serve those areas instead choosing to live and serve higher income areas. I am looking at the Achievement Gap through a general lens because I do not know what population I might work with specifically in the future. I read an article called, "Closing the Gap: An Overview" by Anne Rogers Poliakoff. The article looks at the issue of the Achievement Gap, identifies its causes, and discusses many strategies to solving the problem including changing educational institutions, the political body, and the community itself. Causes that were identified included little political recognition for success in the progress towards universal achievement under the No Child Left Behind Act. There was a school which increased the Language Arts proficiency of its students by 5 percent, and the federal government fired away saying the school failed to make adequate progress. Lack of community interest in the success of its students and lack of funding for schools further caused this gap. Without sufficient funding, schools struggle to retain high quality teachers who are invested in the academic achievement of the students. Overall, the Achievement Gap remains a significant problem with no easy answers.

#### **2) Interviewee's Answers (Be sure to ask the questions listed in the directions!!)**

Asking my cooperating teacher about the Achievement Gap led to some significant responses. She answered immediately that she does and have always seen evidence of the Achievement Gap in her students. She used to teach high school before middle school, and when asked about any differences, she said that high schoolers were harder to close the gap with because there was an amount of learned helplessness. Students who previously did poorly continued to perform at the same level. She was happier in middle school because she had a greater influence on changing the success of her students. Two of the major causes she identified were a lack of parental involvement and a limited access to resources for teachers. One of the solutions she identified ADL doing was providing free meals to its students and even free dinners for students who had to stay later at school. By giving students food, it removed one of the distractions a child's education. Another thing she wish the school did more of was to engage the parents of the students. On the teacher level, two of the issues that she said contributed to the achievement gap were cultural differences and assumptions. Most teachers are middle class and white and they aren't as familiar to other cultures. So when a student behaves or responds in a way which is acceptable in his or her culture, that student might be reprimanded at school. Teachers' assumptions also affect how teachers treat their students and what material they assign. Her solution was to be aware of the biases you have and to work to level them out. She also talked about how she assigned diverse reading and even allowed students to choose their own books. She taught a speech called "Ain't I a Woman" which

talked about gender and racial equality. By educating students on the issues and administering diverse content, my teacher worked to combat the Achievement Gap.

### 3) Response to Interviewee's Answers

Overall, I agree with my cooperating teacher's responses. Considering my own life, I do know that I have unwilling biases which effect how I interact with people from different cultures, and I know looking in the news how significant others' interactions can be. Being aware of personal habits can help a person combat them and act on their best behavior. One thing that I think is a little more difficult is understanding the culture of minorities and those from lower socioeconomic situations. When looking at causes of the Achievement Gap, I agree with the suggestions my teacher presented, but I believe that the root extends to the federal government as well. Demanding change without offering new resources or options limits a school's and even a teacher's ability to affect change. Teachers and schools do not set out to cause their students to fail. The purpose of a school and of teachers is to help students learn. And if one of those is being detrimental to a student's learning, then it would be cut. That being said, the government expects student academic achievement to improve when teachers and school are already trying to do that very same thing. I also liked the things that ADL does to help engage parents and to remove distractions from learning. Both help eliminate the gap between lower and middle class learning.

### 4) Factors to consider when teaching members of this group

Some of the things I want to keep in mind when teaching members of this group are to be aware of my biases and to engage students with diverse content. One thing I heard over and over again in my observation was that a teacher should be real with his/his students and not try to be someone they are not. Students appreciate consistency and they will know right away when a teacher is trying to be a different person. Being honest and fair with all of my students is one way I can eliminate biases I may have. Additionally, assigning literature with minority protagonists or written by minority authors allow students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to connect and engage more with the reading. Not only that, but it teaches other students about minority struggles and minority culture. This means that student to student relationships will improve simply because there is a greater level of understanding between students. I also want to mix my classroom. What I mean by this is that when assigning groups, I want to be intentional about diversifying group members. This continues to improve intercultural relationships and it allows students from different cultures to draw on different wealth's of knowledge leading to more creative solutions. Those are three strategies I could use to help minority students to succeed in school.

### 5) Self-reflection

When thinking about the Achievement Gap, one of the most significant impacts on me is considering my personal biases. I have a good grasp on Asian culture which focuses on hard work, respect, and patience. I have a little knowledge about Black culture, and almost none from Hispanic or Native American. I know that deep down, I am a little more guarded developing relationships with black people. And I need to be aware of that bias and actively work to break it anytime I see it and especially when others see it. I have many friends from people from different groups, but I still have biases against those groups as a whole. A big stereotype for low performing students is that they are lazy or stupid. While some may indeed fit this description, that is a belief that I can never be allowed to have. Students come from difficult backgrounds, have other, more pressing responsibilities than school, they may not know where their next meal will come from or if they will

have a home to come to. Although the last is a little extreme, it is a significant issue, and because of that, I have to be sure that I don't make dangerous assumptions without knowing the whole story. This mantra gets told a lot when interacting with others, but as a teacher I have a greater responsibility than just to interact with others and so have to be even more aware of it. I have the power to continue the cycle of academic disparity, and at the same time, I have the power to stop it. Although I won't be able to fully abolish the Achievement Gap on my own, I can still make a significant difference.

## **Part B: Discussion of Classroom Practice (80pts)**

### Topic 1: Assessment

#### Classroom Observations

In the classroom, I observed various strategies for assessment across many different topics and assignments. My cooperating teacher split formative and summative assessments about 75-25. One interesting thing that I observed was the lack of tests in the summative arena. In an English class, there are many skills and concepts to learn and understand, so giving tests allows little room for students to demonstrate real learning. Instead, the teacher would give many projects and would give formative assignments throughout the process of doing the work so that as the students made progress, they were learning each step of the process. Students were graded on the final products and the processes for research. Any standardized testing was only used to make judgements about individual students and the whole class. Another interesting method of assessment was the grading scale. The grading for ADL is done on a 0-8 point scale where a 6 is considered an A.

#### Q & A with the Teacher

I asked my teacher about the advantages and disadvantages to grading on this unique scale. She said this is done specifically because it encourages students who are high achievers to continue to push and grow. A score of a 7-8 says that the student exceeded the completion of the topic and included ideas and concepts in a way which was not taught in class. This allows higher level students to continue to push themselves because they know there is still room for improvement. As far as disadvantages go, pushing the higher achievers to perform even better and encouraging their achievements means that there is less time for struggling students. She reasoned that ADL as a school was more focused on the higher performing students and that sometimes it meant not having as many opportunities for growth for those struggling.

Another thing I asked her about was how she weighted summatives and formatives. She said that formatives are used for borderline grades. Grades are made up of summative grades only, but if a student is evenly between one grade or the other, then she would look at how much they improved from formative to summative grades and if the student's formative grades are on the high or low end. So summatives get the majority of the weight, but formatives are used to break ties.

#### Reflection

Learning about this topic was great. I went into this class believing that summatives were the most important grades. And while summatives carry significant weight, formatives facilitate learning. I also agree that as a subject, English does not lend itself to much testing and that students should be assessed more on products and processes. This way students can be confident in their abilities to produce writings and products. I was very interested in the method of grading. Giving

students 0-8's where an A is 6 sounds perfect to me. I know that there is always room for improvement and giving students the boundaries to continue to strive for better is significant. I have to be careful though that I still focus on students who struggle to get a 3 (C).

## Topic 2: Educational Technology

### Classroom Observations

In the classroom, I observed various strategies for applying educational technology. Aside from standard technologies like white boards, books, and the internet, technologies have a massive impact on student growth. There are an almost unlimited range of tools and resources for instructors to teach. In the classroom, students used a number of these including CommonLit.com which is a literature database where teachers can assign readings or allow students to select literature with different parameters. And the best part about it is that it is free. Another technology that was used was Google Classrooms. Each student has a Gmail which gives them access to online assignments, documents, slides, and information on a cloud. Not only that, but a major function of Google is that the tools are collaborative. Collaborative and cloud mean that students can work together on the same document from different locations and access the projects from anywhere with internet. One use of this tool I loved was that one of the days I was observing, the students had to peer review each other's documents. So they shared the documents with their group and why were able to highlight claims and evidence, and make comments and suggestions. While you are restricted by the tools in Google Docs, it is less complicated then making students print out a document and make physical edits.

### Q & A with the Teacher

One of the conversations I had with my cooperating teacher involved how to use technology in project-based learning. One of the previous assignments that students were given was to design a website (using a template) as a marketing project. She also suggested that students can create videos using a wide variety of editing tools, design advertisements on Paint, and make a lesson to teach the class (Presentation tools- PowerPoint or Nearpod). She did go further to caution me about student's limitations in their access to technology and its tools. Her suggestion was to either build in project time during class and be willing to stay later to allow students to complete the assignment, or to use web-based tools which can be accessed on any computer and do not require students to pay for an application. I also asked her about how she used the Epson board in the classroom. She said she doesn't care much for the functionality of the technology. Anytime a technical problem comes up, students get distracted from the content and there is less time for learning since she has to refocus students and take time to solve the issue. So she just uses the Epson board as a projector which can be frozen.

### Reflection

I was happy to see students using Google applications in the classroom. Cloud and Collaborative tools are, in my opinion, the best tools for document/product production. It leaves very little excuse for students to say, "I lost it, forgot it at home, didn't finish in class, my partner is sick and he has it." Or similar excuses. Not only does it eliminate excuses and the reasons for them, but it can give me as the instructor access to students outside of school as well. This is true because students can email me questions regarding an assignment, and I can get on their document and help them directly. When I used to think of educational technologies, I would consider tools like smart

boards and devices like computers, tablets, and BYOD, but I never spent much time considering the educational resources online. Although it takes extra work to learn different technologies, as long as I am proficient in the technology and I understand how I want students to use it, then educational technology will be able to play a significant role in my future students' educations.

### Topic 3: Instructional Strategies

#### Classroom Observations

In my classroom, I saw my corporate teacher use different instructional strategies in her various classes and even with individual students. One example of this variety was in a lesson on the rhetorical situation and Ethos, Pathos and Logos. My teacher taught the same lesson to all of her students, but for her honors class, she taught them by giving examples, asking questions, and eventually drawing out a conclusion for the topic then applying that knowledge. This was geared towards inquiry based. The next class consisted of her regular students who needed more help, and their lesson was more guided. They were given the explanation of concepts, examples, then they had to apply those concepts to new examples. Her strategies for teaching went further than inquiry vs. guided teaching. Her methodology in a normal topic was to teach, then have large group practice, slam group practice, and finally individual practice (typically homework). She gave a lot of opportunities for self and peer review which would function within her teaching methodologies. In the class, students were assigned both classical literature and personal reading. My cooperating teacher would use literature to help facilitate learning skills as well. She gave students assignments along with the books which required students to find and analyze evidence, use close reading skills, analyze audience and purpose, and which developed other skills. She even had students present their personal books using Ethos, Pathos, and Logos to each other as a marketing strategy.

#### Q & A with the Teacher

One question I was concerned with was why make a distinction between using guided/inquiry-based in teaching different classes. She responded that inquiry-based learning requires higher level thinking, so she uses it to push her students when she has the time. According to her inquiry-based learning is better for learning a concept since it asks students to reason and come to a conclusion instead of just having that conclusion given to them in guided learning. When asked when she would choose guided based learning for her higher thinkers, she responded with when she was more interested in students applying the concept. Guided learning helps students use a concept or idea faster. One example of inquiry-based learning that she said she does at the beginning of every year is a project where each student is given a list of evidence, and they pretend to be investigators. So students analyze evidence, draw a conclusion based on that evidence, and construct an argument which supports that conclusion. I also asked her about project-based learning, and she said that she rarely does project-based learning unless it is very relevant. She talked about something called the "cereal box syndrome." For this project, students used to make a cereal box with a picture of a character on the front and then in the "ingredients" section, students would come up with a list of traits and attributes that made up the specific character. The trouble with this project is that students are really wasting their time by representing their character. Making students put the information on a cereal box did not teach them anything more, and most students were not that excited about the project. So she warned me to be careful about project-based learning.

#### Reflection



Before this class, my extent of knowledge of instructional strategies were either sub-conscious or limited to teaching by using various senses. Looking into guided and inquiry-based learning, I want to ask my students questions to help them arrive at a conclusion. I don't want to just give them the answers and then ask them to use it. Whenever possible, I want to develop deeper and more creative thinkers because English is more of a thinking/reasoning class. I don't exactly agree that lower level students should be automatically assigned guided teaching. I would rather push the class to inquiry learning, and if that fails, then I would fall back on asking more guided questions. The only time I would begin with guided would be on subversive or controversial topics where I want my students to engage in meaningful discussion and thinking than heated argument. I also like that she incorporated a significant portion of class to self and peer review. Even when grading, she would have her students record their grades in a folder so that they could see how different formative assignments have led to their success (or failure) on summatives.

#### Topic 4: Student Motivation

##### Classroom Observations

In my classroom, I had the opportunity to observe strategies which the teacher used to motivate the students. Right when I walked in to well after, I saw that one of the most significant motivations was relationships. Students will be engaged with content if they like it, but nearly every student generally liked my teacher, and that was incredible. Because my teacher knew her students, she was able to be intentional about creating groups, having specific students go first in presentations to set an example, and even knowing when to allow students choices about if they wanted to work with someone and who they wanted to work with. One interesting thing I noticed was that with one of her classes, she let them partner up to read together and complete questions about the reading instead of doing that at home. Another motivator was in her management style. On a regular basis, she had her room set up in groups of 4-5, and about once a week, she would do something going on where the classroom would be rearranged. Even on a daily basis, having students physically move contributed to their engagement because they were less likely to get antsy. Another example which was effective was changing a lesson to solve a problem in a previous class. Students were doing a character analysis for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and at first, the lesson was a classroom discussion about each of the characters. After about 4, the students lost interest, and the teacher took that to mean she needed to change. In the next class, they still did a character analysis, but each group was assigned two characters to analyze and then they presented their analysis to their peers. This worked very well as most to all of the students were engaged.

##### Q & A with the Teacher

I asked my teacher about why she devoted class time to reading a chapter instead of assigning it for homework. Her response was that students would often come to class when reading was the assigned homework, and nothing was done. This meant that students were unable to participate in quality discussions, and they performed badly on content/skills taught through the book as a tool. Because they read in class with a partner, they were accountable to their partner, and they were able to have fresh knowledge of the plot to be able to have quality discussions about the book. I also asked her about how she choose groups and when she allowed students to choose groups. She said for introductory or smaller group projects she would just use the groups at the tables which the students have a measure of choice over, and for larger projects, she tried to sort them by grade/motivation. Other factors play a role too, for example, there were two students in one of her blocks who were great friends and would always talk, so for projects, she made sure they were

separated or else they wouldn't be able to focus. In specific situations, she would change groups, but those decisions were informed by the knowledge she had of her students.

## Reflection

At the beginning of the semester, I went into this class believing that one of the most important motivations for students were grades. I knew there were other things like parental motivation and in class rewards like maybe not having to take a final exam, the ability to get out of doing homework, having free time, and other similar motivators. But after observing and asking the teacher questions, I learned that there are a lot of behind the scenes strategies which can help students engage with the lesson and focus on content. One interesting thing I've observed outside of this classroom is student's response and use of memes to communicate. For many students, using memes is a way to communicate respectfully behind the teacher's back. I've learned that incorporating memes in regular discussion can help students make connections to things outside of school and engage more with the topic since it is something they can relate to. That being said, incorporating ties to relatable items with content will help motivate students to learn more. I also like how the teacher was able to adapt her lesson when something didn't work. I saw numerous examples of improvement in subsequent lessons, so that is a strategy I want to carry forward as well: flexibility.

### Overall Reflection:

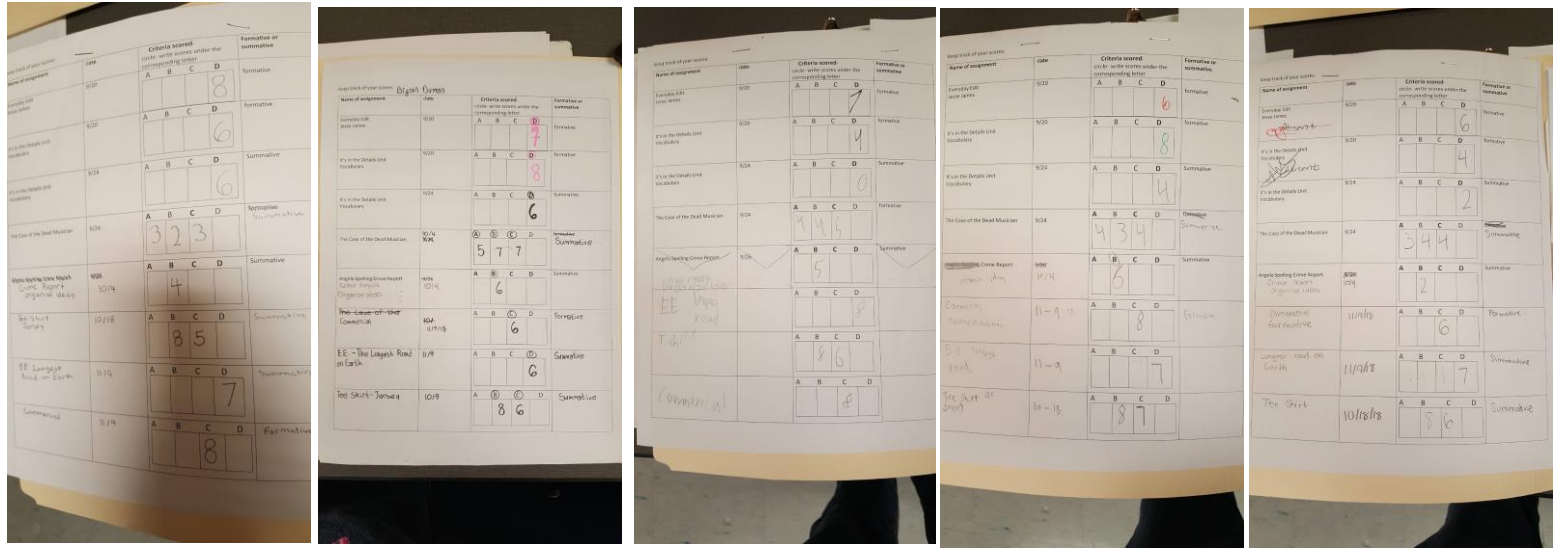
Learning about all of these topics and more was incredibly beneficial to my future success in the classroom. Not only that, but each topic is interconnected with the others. Instructional strategies inform your assessment which plays a role in what you need to redo or change. That information gets used to decide what strategies will continue to work. This also affects what technologies work for different assignments and lessons. Educational technology is a way to motivate student learning which will increase their performance. Different instructional strategies also have an impact on student motivation. There are so many topics, ideas, lessons, and strategies which go into teaching that deciding on the perfect combination will most likely not happen in the first year of teaching. But learning now what is likely to work and learning the pros and cons to each topic solution will give me a wealth of ideas to draw on as I play trial and error for my first few years as a teacher. The really scary thing is that all of these ideas and strategies that I am learning about is only for teaching one subject to one age group...

## **Part C: Investigating Further (60 pts)**

### **1. Background**

The subject I am looking at is the effect of formative assignments on summative assessments. When observing, I saw that the teacher directly called certain assignments formative or summative. The formative grades were not counted towards a final grade unless it was right in the middle. Instead students were just graded on their summatives, but emphasis was placed on growing from the formative assignments. Another thing I learned about was that students could not be graded on homework if students did not turn in their assignments. This was incredibly bizarre for me. I hope to see the impact that formative assignments, which do not include homework, have on summative grades.

## 2. Data



Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Average Grades
8	7	7	6	6	6.8=A
6	8	4	8	4	5.6=B+
6	6	0	4	2	3.6 (4.5)=C(B)
3	6.5	4	4	4	4.3=B
4	6	5	6	2	4.6=B
6.5	6	8	8	6	6.9=A+
7	6	7	7	7	6.8=A
8	7	8	7.5	7	7.5=A+

The above table is a collection of 5 random students grades so far this semester. The grades bolded in yellow are the formative assignments and the green are summative assignments. Students were required to self-record their grades in a folder and then keep their assignments in the folder. The above pictures are student documents of their actual grades. While only 5 students were looked at, it is a sufficient sample size for a class of only 28 students. That being said, the data should show statistically significant information to be analyzed. As seen, students began the semester performing well on summative assignments to great towards the end of the semester. This is exactly what should happen. At the beginning of the year, students were performing okay, but as the year progresses, students' summative grades improve to the level of the formative grades. The formative grades remained consistent, but that is to be expected for intro level assignments designed for improvement more than final application and assessment.

## 3. Reflection

Based on the data, I would conclude that formative assessments have a significant impact on the growth of students. The question on how to use assignments so that formatives can have the desired outcome is answered through observation. On three of the seven days I observed, students worked together to provide feedback for each other. Two were very informal types of feedback



where students switched papers or PowerPoints with each other, and they looked for certain criteria and gave feedback for missing parts or parts which could add a point or two. The third time students had to present a book review to their peers. The class was broken into about thirds, and the presenter's peers would grade students based on a rubric. I asked my teacher if she was grading the presentation as a formative or summative, and she said that this one would be a formative, but at the end of the year, they would do another book review, and they would make changes based on notes taken during the feedback process for a summative grade. Having students involved in the feedback process lets them know what to look for in their own work since they are assessing it in others. In the future, I know that I need to be aware of how I use formative assessments. I plan on administering assignments to students and allowing them to have self and peer feedback. For summative assignments, I still want to discuss with students about what they did and still use it for growth although the grade will still be significant in comparison. I don't agree to only use formative grades as tie breakers though. In my classroom I want students to receive some benefit from formative grades in the form of participation credit. Even if the formative grades only make up 20% of their grade, in my opinion, students will be more inclined to do the work. I will definitely be sure to use formative assignments to further teach students as much as I can.

#### **Part D: Your Evolving Educational Philosophy (20 pts)**

##### **1. My Cooperating Teacher's Philosophy.**

I believe that my cooperating teacher's educational philosophy revolves around progressivism and essentialism. Progressivism is where students are actively engaged in their learning process. They make some choices, they are required to problem solve, and it holds the belief that education begins with the student. Essentialism is the philosophy which teaches students the essential skills to be successful in the modern world. There is a focus on skills, academic knowledge, and middle-class values. I saw these two educational philosophies dominantly in my teacher's classroom. She engaged students in inquiry-based projects with a focus on student leadership. My teacher facilitated discussion and allowed the students to add content. There was even one day where students were just teaching each other, and the teacher had little intervention. I also saw essentialism when the teacher would apply different analysis skills to the real world. Even at the beginning of the year, students were investigators, and later they became marketers. With a student-centered classroom and the application of skills and emphasis on problem solving, I believe my teacher's educational philosophy revolves around Progressivism and Essentialism.

##### **2. My Philosophy.**

Personally, I believe that my educational philosophy progressivism and social reconstructivism. At the beginning of the year, my educational philosophy would probably have been described as essentialism, but I want my students to become people as they learn. Talking to my peers in class has helped me decide that there is still many things wrong with society, and I want students to be able to identify their beliefs and advocate positive change. Before this class, I wasn't aware how significant the achievement gap was and how necessary it is to educate others about it so they can affect change. I also want them to facilitate their learning and pursue the topics they are passionate about. As long as I require certain elements in assignments, I can be sure that my students are still learning the skills they need while being excited about the content. Observing helped me make the switch from essentialism to progressivism. I still want to teach skills, but I want to do it in a way where students are able to have greater freedom and responsibility over their own

learning. I believe giving them that will best prepare them for their future where they will have total freedom and responsibility.