

**EDUCATION 350: ETHNOGRAPHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
PROFESSOR MASON
OBSERVATION JOURNAL**

Amanda Cohen
October 2nd, 2012
Class Level: GED
Class Subject: GED Prep
School: BOCES

On Monday October 2nd, I began my ethnographic observations at the BOCES alternative school of Oneida County. Before I entered a classroom I met with a school administrator who gave me a brief run down of the student population. This person informed me that I will most likely experience some verbal outbursts from the students. Physical fights are also fairly common and I am not to intervene if one breaks out. I should never be left alone with the students. I should make sure to dress professionally and always keep my belongings on me or locked up.

From 9:15am to 10:45am I was in Ms. Brenagin's classroom. This class was for students studying for and trying to get their GED. 85%- 90% of the students are from Utica, NY. Each student has his or her own folder with material and work directly related to his or her current level. Each student's levels in the various subjects (in this case reading, writing, and math) have been recorded. I was assigned to work individually with two students. The first one, Marie, is 19 years old and her writing, which is what we worked on, is at a 9th grade level. Marie has a checklist of assignments that she needs to complete, so we went down the list and worked out of the GED book. Marie would read a passage aloud to me and then we would look at the multiple-choice questions, which usually consisted of rewriting/correcting a sentence. If Marie got the answer correct, then we moved on, but if she

chose the wrong answer, then we would work through it together and I would explain why the other answer is correct.

The second student I worked with, Brooke, needed help with reading. She was about the same age as Marie, but was at a sixth grade reading level. Marie read a composition and then had three sections of questions to answer: comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking, which was the hardest section for her. We followed the same procedure that I followed with Marie.

The classroom was structured to enforce and encourage individual work. Each of the approximately five students had his or her own desk with dividers that surrounded the perimeter of the classroom. The room had many inspirational and motivational posters on the wall. The students did not interact with one another and the teacher circled around from student to student. Because I was tutoring one-on-one, it was hard for me to see if the teacher stopped and helped each student during her rounds. This is something that I would like to pay more attention to next time.

Amanda Cohen
October 2nd, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Lunch and Phys. Ed.
School: BOCES

The alt. ed. Students at this lunch period only had about eighteen minutes for lunch because they are enrolled in the career tech program at BOCES. They do alternative education in the morning then have one split period for both lunch and physical education. This group occupied half of the cafeteria while some students

from the special education school occupied the other half of the cafeteria (they ate with their teachers). Two teacher assistants supervised the alt. ed. students and there are always two police officers patrolling during lunch. I noticed that most of the alternative education students sat at the same table, but there were three black students (the only black students at the time) who sat at a different table. Some students brought lunch while others ate the food provided by the cafeteria. There was a peanut free table in the corner, but nobody was there.

Once half of the period was too much, the students made their way across the hall to the gym. The gym was divided in half by a curtain, so the students only had half of the gym available to them. There were some basketballs out for the students to play with. A few boys played while everyone else sat against the wall. The phys. Ed. teacher was absent, so only his assistant was there to supervise. The TA informed me that there is usually other activities set up, such as ping-pong and badminton in addition to basketball for the students. The TA also said that the general rule is that the students just need to be up and moving while in the gym in order to receive credit. They can walk in circles if they choose not to participate in the activities. This was not what was happening today. The TA also noted that there was one kid missing and needed to be written up. Next week, I'd like to see the difference in participation and student attitude between this phys. Ed. period and when the teacher is present.

One scenario that stood out from the fifteen minutes in the gym was when one boy ran in and screamed, "yo everybody, get the fuck on the ground." Although I might not have understood the humor in this statement, all the other students

appeared to know that it was a joke and carried on with whatever they were doing. The boy proceeded to then start messing around with a girl who was sitting on the far side of the gym. He was physically holding her and touching her and she was laughing. The TA made an announcement that nobody listened too and then it was time for the students to go to career tech and my observation hours were over.

Amanda Cohen
October 4th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Lunch
School: BOCES

I arrived at the BOCES alternative education school at noon and began my observations in the cafeteria. The physical set up was the same as Monday. The students are not supposed to use their phones, but exceptions can be made for extreme circumstances such as, a parent calling from jail, or a parent in the hospital. One of the two teacher assistants supervising the lunchroom informed me that the school locks up all cell phones when the students enter in the morning. Every student is “wanded” to check for weapons and cell phones.

The TA also informed me about the alternative school group dynamics. There are two main social circles: the “inner city kids” (from Utica) and the “farm kids.” Generally, the two groups don’t fight each other. Rather, the fights would break out within a specific group. According to the same supervisor, the farm kids usually smell bad because they get up and four in the morning to milk cows and then have a long ride to school. She also noted that she thinks it is easier to break up

fights between boys than fights between girls. She recommended the book Breaking Night by Liz Murray.

Amanda Cohen
October 4th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Resource Room
School: BOCES

Following lunch, I went to Ms. Hardy's resource room. Initially there were two boys and two girls. The boys worked quietly and independently on work that their teachers sent to the resource room for them to complete. Ms. Hardy worked with two eighth grade girls (the only students she has from the middle school) for twenty minutes. One of the girls was working on math definitions- looking up math terms and writing down the definitions) while the other girl was working on an English test. The teacher read passages aloud to the student while she answered the short answer questions. One girl was very outspoken. She repeatedly made comments like "I ain't doing this" and "what you want me to do with this." She also accidentally dropped her pencil in the garbage and made the teacher get it out.

The two girls and the teacher sat at a large round table in the back of the room (while the two boys worked at separate desks in the front). Despite the girls acting stubborn, the teacher was able to convince the girls that there is nothing wrong with getting help when they don't understand something. The girls engaged me by asking why I'm there and where I go to school. The more outspoken one also asked me to sit at the table with them. I then helped her look up her math terms. By the end of the session, she asked me to sign her folder (her friends and teachers and

signed it too). The girls were picked up and escorted to their next class. When they left, another teacher came in and asked about the girls' progress. The resource room teacher updated her on their attitudes and what they accomplished during resource room time today. The two boys continued to work quietly and independently for another twenty minutes when their period ended.

For the final period of the day, Ms. Hardy only had one student in her room. She informed me that this boy, a senior, is a very bright kid and (off the record) the only reason that he comes to resource room is because the school has nothing else to do with him. He has passed all of his classes and regents exams and is waiting to graduate. He has to take an English class and complete a senior project in order to graduate, but other than that he has fulfilled all of his requirements and is waiting to graduate. He participates in the career tech program and is set to join the Marines when he graduates. Let's call him Brad. Thus, Ms. Hardy doesn't have much academic work to do with Brad.

When Brad entered the room, he immediately went to the one computer that's in the back of the room. He asked Ms. Hardy to log him in and he started surfing the web- I couldn't tell what he was reading. The teacher asked Brad about his senior project for English, but Brad refused to work on it yet (he has a little while before it's due). Ms. Hardy started asking Brad about how his job hunt was going, knowing that he was looking for a job. Brad was frustrated about not getting hired despite sending out many applications. He thinks the fact that he has a "youthful offender status" is preventing employers from hiring him.

The conversation transitioned into the topic of race and Brad, a white, Italian, eighteen year old male, expressed an extreme hatred for black people, calling them Niggers. At this point I became extremely enraged; despite wanting to put in my input on his comments, I will keep this ethnographic entry strictly observational. Brad was talking about a black girl in the cafeteria who was talking loudly about her STDs. Brad then concluded that all black people are “scumbags.” He said that he avoids them at all costs and doesn’t want to talk to them or interact with them. Brad comes to BOCES from Whitsboro, which has a reputation of being very Caucasian and homogenous. When I asked Brad if he has ever experienced being a minority, he started talking about his experience in jail, which was full of black people. He said he only hung out with the Aryan “brotherhood” and stayed away from the black people, who were the majority, as much as he could.

Ms. Hardy was absolutely shocked to hear Brad talk like this. She was not aware that he was ever in prison and that he is such an extreme racist. Rather than dismissing Brad’s comments as ignorant and inappropriate, she kept the conversation going by asking follow up questions. She tried explaining that he should not generalize about all “African American” people based on a few encounters he has had. She repeatedly said African American rather than black. When the bell rang, Brad ran out and Ms. Hardy explained to me that this was all new to her and that she wasn’t aware of Brad’s history and beliefs before. Overall, Brad accomplished zero academic work (there wasn’t even a learning goal established).

Amanda Cohen
October 22nd, 2012

Class Level: GED
Class Subject: GED Prep
School: BOCES

Today I worked with three different students on writing in Ms. Brenagin's GED class. The first student was writing at a grade six level, the second student was writing at a grade nine level, and the third student was writing at a grade seven level. I remember working on parallel structure rules and how to write series. With all three students my tutoring method was relatively the same. We read through some instructions together and examples about the topic (i.e. parallelism) and then talked through the questions. If the student got the answer wrong, I would let them try again and make sure they know why their answer was incorrect and the other answer fits better. Ms. Brenagin was walking around to the other students, keeping everyone focused.

In the cafeteria, the alternative education students took up three tables and the special education group took up another three tables. Someone (I'm not sure what his role is) came in to take attendance; he was very friendly to all the passing students. He told the TA that he wants to point a specific student out to her (a new student), so that she can keep an eye on her.

During gym, some students were playing basketball and others were socializing. One kid asked me if I had any interesting notes. Another kid was told to put her phone away, but she told the TA that it was just a fancy calculator. The students who were socializing next to me kept repeatedly asking one boy why he got "that girl" pregnant. They talked a lot about dating and boyfriend/ girlfriend situations. Then the conversation shifted to how they act while on drugs. One boy

can't do drugs right now because he's on probation. They never touched a basketball or did any sort of exercise whatsoever.

Amanda Cohen
October 24, 2012
Class Level: 9th grade
Class Subject: Living Environment
School: BOCES

Upon arriving to class, the teacher tells me that the class finished what she wanted to do today yesterday, so she's not sure what we'll do today (approx. five minutes before the start of class). When the kids enter the room they immediately started rearranging the desks (not sure why). The girl who sat next to me appeared VERY pregnant (I checked with the teacher at the end of the class and the teacher informed me that she's about 32 weeks pregnant. The father goes to the BOCES School too and is in eleventh grade. When she has the child she's allowed to miss six weeks of school and Utica has to pay to a tutor to go to her house.). There were six students present in class, but one left in the middle.

After a few minutes of chatter, the teacher passed out a heart diagram. One of the students insisted that I get one as well (see attached). The teacher instructed the students to try to label the parts of the heart from memory. They were struggling so the teacher said they can use their memory plus book to complete the diagram. After a couple of minutes, the teacher collected the class' attention to go over the parts of the heart. Next time I should pay more attention to exactly how much time the students were given before the teacher allowed them to use their books and before she gathered the class to go over the diagram. The first part she

labeled was the pulmonary vein. She recapped that veins go to the heart from lungs, so they have Oxygen. Throughout the lesson, the three questions asked were concerned with drinks (alcoholic?), stabbing, and AIDS. The teacher continued to fill in the rest of the heart parts.

When the heart diagram was completed, the teacher told the class that she was going to give them something (a crossword puzzle) for the last five minutes, but if they can be good, she won't. At this point, one kid asked to go get a drink, but the teacher said no and threatened to write him up if he kept asking. When the bell rang all the students immediately walked out.

Amanda Cohen
October 24, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Resource Room
School: BOCES

There were three students present in the resource room today. Ms. Hardy had to call one of the student's teachers to find out what her work was. There was one girl who worked alone and quietly in the corner the whole time. Ms. Hardy started off working with the boy in the front. He ended up finishing his lab with fifteen minutes left in the period, so Ms. Hardy gave him something "easy" to do (I'm not exactly sure what that was. The teacher asked the two girls how they were doing and they were both fine. Ms. Hardy ended up sitting with one of them for the rest of the period. They got a little distracted and off topic at time, but they finished her work.

Brad was missing today, so it was very quiet and uneventful. Ms. Hardy informed me that yesterday he was suspended and today he is cutting. She wrote him up for using his cell phone, so he's mad at her and not coming to class. This just creates a vicious cycle because the more he skips class the more trouble he will get in and he won't be able to come as punishment.

Amanda Cohen
October 29, 2012
Class Level: GED
Class Subject: GED
School: BOCES

The first student I worked with today was Calvin. We worked on math, more specifically adding and subtracting fractions. His grade level was not listed on his folder, but he was working out of the pre-GED book (rather than the GED book). When going over his answers, Calvin did most of the math accurately, but consistently forgot to reduce his final answer. I remember him struggling to understand how $\frac{3}{6}$ is the same as $\frac{1}{2}$. In the middle of my time with Calvin, it was time for the pledge. The teacher made sure that every student was standing to observe it, but she was the only one who I could hear reciting it. Calvin and I started working on multiplying fractions, when the teacher moved me to work with Brooke for reading help.

Brooke is listed as being at an eighth grade reading level. The way the reading section is set up in the book is that there is a reading passage and then a comprehension set of questions, a vocabulary set of questions, and a critical thinking set of questions. Next time I want to find out how long the students have to

complete the section during the exam. Before even reading the passage, Brooke started on the vocabulary section. She looked up each word in the dictionary (is this allowed during the exam) and chose what she thought was the best answer. Brooke got three of the ten vocab questions wrong. I explained those words to her and then we moved on to reading the passage.

Brooke began reading aloud. She confused many simple words, for example she said “and” when it said “had” and she mistook “this” for “his” as well as confusing could and would. When trying to read a word that she was unsure about, her voice went up at the end, which told me to either correct her after she said it, or to confirm that she got the pronunciation correct. She struggled with all loner words, even if the word had been repeated in the passage. As she was reading, she followed along with her finger to keep her place. At one point, Brooke asked if I would read for a little bit.

Brooke told me that it was time for her to take a break at one point. She left me and went on the computer. When she came back she told me about the storm that we’re expecting (hurricane Sandy). We moved on to the comprehension questions, which weren’t too difficult for her even though she did get a couple wrong. Finally, we moved on to the critical thinking section, which she said is the hardest for her. We didn’t get to finish all of them because we ran out of time, but Brooke definitely struggles with the questions that ask her to differentiate between fact and opinion.

Amanda Cohen

October 29, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Lunch and Gym
School: BOCES

Calvin and Brooke were the first ones in the cafeteria, but then more students arrived. Everyone had the school lunch (mozzarella sticks) except for one girl who came with a lunch box. The special education group was in their usual spot with their teachers. I noticed that Brooke had her headphones in. I wonder if there can be engaged learning time at lunch? Even if there is no teacher and set curriculum, can interacting with peers in a more social setting, be a form of engaged learning? At 11:05am the young kids arrived and sat with their teachers. I walked to the other side of the cafeteria from where I normally stand during observations to see if I'd get a different perspective on anything. The room appeared a little brighter from the other side, but I noticed the same thing in regards to the students. I hope the reusable red plastic trays are clean because the food is directly on them.

The gym class had a smaller turnout than on other days. There were eight boys playing basketball and six other students chatting by the wall and one student sitting in a chair by the teacher. Was he in a time out? Or was he just being lazy or antisocial? There was also another kid standing just outside the door. Finally, a few more stragglers sauntered in. The teacher was also missing at first, but then he was there. At one point one of the patrolling police officers poked his head in.

One thing I learned was that what sounded like an intense fight to me was actually just some kids playing around. As a teacher, it is important to know your students well enough to be able to know when there is actually a serious problem that needs an authority to get involved compared to a playful type of "fight."

The teacher made a “one minute left” announcement and then the kids left on their own.

Amanda Cohen
October 31, 2012
Class Level: 9th grade
Class Subject: Living Environment
School: BOCES

When I arrived to the classroom, the teacher told me that it’s not going to be the most interesting day to observe because the students are taking a test. When the students arrived, the teacher told them that all the seats had to remain facing forward. One girl who had already taken the test tried to turn her seat, but the teacher didn’t let her. The test was on the circulatory and digestive systems and was open notes (the teacher gave them a copy of her notes- printed PowerPoint slides-, they didn’t have to use their own). Only five students were in the room (four taking the test). The teacher offered bonus points on the test to the students who took their own notes on the topic, so they didn’t feel like they took notes for no reason (since the teacher gave everyone notes for the test).

During the test, the teacher sat at her desk in the front of the classroom, facing the students. If a student had a question, then he or she had to raise his or her hand and the teacher would go to the student. There were two typing errors on the test. One question said “ate” instead of “are” and the other mistake said “heard” instead of “heat.” When one student had to go to the bathroom, the teacher got a bathroom escort. One student asked someone how to spell a word. The teacher told her that that’s not acceptable and will not get points for that question. The girl did

not understand why her question was unacceptable and tried fighting it for a little, but ultimately gave up.

The teacher had an assignment to give the students for when they finished the test that was meant to get them started on the next unit: the respiratory system. Once they finished, they started wondering around until it was time to leave.

When I went to the resource room for my next observation period, another teacher informed me that the teacher was absent today.

Amanda Cohen
November 5th, 2012
Class Level: GED
Class Subject: GED Prep
School: BOCES

When I arrived in the GED room, Ms. Brenagin was not present because she was at a meeting, but the teacher assistant was in the room, so she placed me with a student. The first few students didn't want the one on one help, but there was one student who expressed interest in working with a tutor. This was the first time I worked on the science section. As we worked through a couple of sections, the student told me about his guessing strategy. I explained to him why he should not just guess on the questions and emphasized the importance of reading the provided passage. The general set up of the science section consisted of a paragraph, or two, on a certain topic, such as ecosystems or the water cycle and an accompanying diagram. This student was mostly at a tenth grade level for most subjects, but his

science level was not on his folder.

The next student I worked with was Calvin, a student who I have now worked with three times. We worked on the reading section; the passage was about a space shuttle that crashed. He got nine out of ten correct on the comprehension, six out of ten correct on the critical thinking, and we worked on the vocabulary part together. The next thing that we worked on was rewriting a paragraph to edit errors and then we ended with a pronoun activity.

When the students left, I talked to Ms. Brenagin about the GED. She showed me a New York State GED exam and said she wasn't sure about eh GED in other states. She does not time her students while they are practicing even though the test is timed. However, to prepare for the timing of the test, her students practice with readings that are longer than those on the exam.

I missed the lunch section because I had to register for my spring semester classes. The physical education was the same as it usually is, but this time some kids were playing ping-pong too. There were two basketball hoops in use and there were a couple of rowdy boys. There were still a decent amount of kids sitting against the wall.

Amanda Cohen
November 7th, 2012
Class Level: 9th grade
Class Subject: Living Environment
School: BOCES

Today was “assessment day” for the class; they were taking a New York State practice regents. The teacher said that they have to take one at the beginning of the year and one at the end of the year, so they can track each student’s progress and see how much he or she has learned and has grown throughout the year. At the beginning of the period the kids kept trying to rebel and were complaining a lot. They were struggling to understand why they had to take the test even though the teacher explained the reason (track growth) quite a few times. They kept saying how “we know we’re going to fail” and “we’re not as smart as you.”

In order to improve behavior, the teacher said that she will grade the students on their behaving during the assessment. If they behave, then they will get a good quiz grade factored into their grade, but if they do not cooperate, then they will lose points on the quiz. A few students didn’t really understand how to use the answer sheet- they had to transfer their multiple-choice answers to a separate sheet, so the teacher had to walk two students through that process individually. Eventually, the teacher said no more talking or that she would write them up. (I wonder if this was an empty threat or if she actually followed through).

The teacher allowed a student who had been quite and cooperating to go to the bathroom, but not a student who had been speaking out and disruptive. The kid next to me had his head down and was snoring.

Amanda Cohen
November 7th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Resource
School: BOCES

There were only two girls in the resource room today; the teacher was reading aloud to one. The other student was copying notes alone in the corner and said she didn't need help. After a few minutes, the teacher asked the student to read for a little bit; they were reading Number The Stars by Lois Lowry.

When they finished reading aloud, the eighth grade girl told me that I shouldn't be a teacher because their students call teachers names. She proceeded to tell me about her intense in school suspension that she just finished serving because she got into a fight with a teacher. She was supposed to go back to her district November 12th, but because of her suspension, she can't go back now until February 2013. She also briefly talked about drinking and smoking and her mother's habits. The student also asked the teacher about a friend of hers in the after school program and the teacher said she knows her.

Amanda Cohen
November 14th, 2012
Class Level: 9th Grade
Class Subject: Living Environment
School: BOCES

When the bell rang there were no students in class yet. I asked the teacher if the class finished the practice regents. She told me that most of them did and that there was lots of complaining; the grades ranged from the 20's to the 70's. There were only four kids in class today (there was one more, but he was sent to Ms. Covey- I don't know why) and someone mentioned that there had been a lot of fights in school today. The teacher had some work for the students to do and she said that because the class is so small today, they can work in groups or with a partner to

complete the packet. Three of the students immediately got together and the other boy just put his head down on his desk. The teacher wanted him to wake up so she went over to him and said “I’m gonna annoy you until you get up.”

The teacher told the class that the packet they are working on will help them prepare for the jeopardy game that they’re going to play tomorrow, which she followed up by saying, “there’s no reading and no writing, so you should like it.” A few minutes later the teacher got a bathroom escort and all three of the students working together left to go to the bathroom at once. The teacher asked the kid who was sitting with his head down why he’s so tired and he mentioned that he feels sick. The teacher needed to explain to the students working together that group work doesn’t entail copying and that they need to work together and not just copy from each other. The student with his head down started to snore, so the teacher said to him “wake up a little but, we can’t have you snoring.” He finally got up and went to join the other three students to go work on the packet.

While the teacher was standing over the group, all of the students would ask her to confirm their answers before they wrote them down. The teacher also moved her knee and hip to demonstrate how the joints work. A few minutes later, the room was the closest to silent I’ve ever heard it. The silence didn’t last very long, but it seemed like the kids were actually working. The kids wanted the lights off, so the teacher turned off three out of the four switches, but wouldn’t turn off the last one. The teacher stood over the group to try to encourage them to keep working. One kid messed up on one of the answers and started furiously crossing out his answer. The kid who was sleepy before got incredibly irritated by the sound of the pen

because he had a headache and said “he’s annoying as fuck” and got up to go sit alone. The class ended shortly after and everyone walked out on their own. This was the first time that I didn’t feel like a huge distraction in class.

When I went to go to the resource room for my second period of observations, there was a note on Ms. Brenagin’s door that said she is out today and that her students should report to Room 315. Unfortunately for me, I couldn’t do my observations, but I found room 315 so that I could see what they do with her students when she’s absent. The teacher standing outside room 315 said that it was the detention room, but none of Ms. Brenagin’s students had arrived yet.

Amanda Cohen
November 26th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: GED
School: BOCES

Today I worked with two different students on GED prep work. The first student I worked with was working on math (fractions, decimals, and percentages). The first section we worked on was concerned with finding sale prices on discounted items. He liked to talk about some of the things or names in the questions. For example, there was one problem about finding the final price of a stereo that was on sale and he told me about his stereo at home. The teacher came over and was joking around with us; she told me that he’s a good kid. He likes to try to be funny at times, but he has a good heart. While working through the problems, he kept guessing the answer (it’s multiple choice) rather than actually trying to solve for the right answer. I started writing out the equations with him to get him to

really try to think through it and I think this strategy was successful because he started understanding the process better.

The next student I worked with was working on writing. We didn't have that much time together, but we worked on verb tenses: past, present, and future. One of the questions mentioned asthma; she tried explaining asthma to me, but was completely wrong about what it is. One of the activities we worked on consisted of underlining either has or had in a sentence, depending on the tense of the sentence. Verb tenses seemed pretty easy to this student (who is at a 6th grade level).

At the end of the class, the teacher was saying good luck to one of the students she is sending to the GED exam tomorrow. She was telling him to make sure to get a good night sleep tonight and not to be tired for any reason tomorrow morning. This student came and went in three months. His good friend has been here all year and last year and is still not ready. He's complaining about all the work, but he needs to improve his math before he can be ready for the test.

Amanda Cohen
November 26th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: Lunch
School: BOCES

I saw seven alternative ed. students at lunch. There were three at one table, two at the next table, and two and the third table. There were all very quite and just eating. At one point an adult walked by and ate something off one of the student's trays.

Rather than only talking to the T.A., the actually gym teacher spoke to me for the first time today. He said that what I see is actually more of a recess for these students rather than a physical education class. THIS EXAPLAINS A LOT!!! I wasn't as frustrated with the lack of instruction and participation knowing that it was more of a recess than a class. There were very few students present today. At first, all of the girls were missing. There were nine boys playing basketball and two sitting against the wall. Then, one girl sauntered in late. It was very calm compared to most days. Even though this is more of a recess period, I'm pretty sure these kids don't have any other physical education time.

Amanda Cohen
November 28th, 2012
Class Level: 9th Grade
Class Subject: Living Enviornment
School: BOCES

Prior to the students arriving, the teacher told me that her class is the worst combination of kids she has had to deal with in a really long time. I asked if she thinks they're distracted by me and she said not really; sometimes they might use me as a distraction, but if they weren't distracted by me, then they'd be distracted by something else, so what I see is a pretty typical class for them. Today there were five students present. Two of them were making "bloop" noises. The teacher handed out the lab that they were going to do today. The only girl in the room said, "what the fuck is that smell?" The teacher responded by saying "Languag!" and the girl started laughing. The kid who has paid the most attention to me this semester kept "blooping" at me. When the teacher asked who wanted to read a section of the

lab, nobody volunteered. Before she could get someone to read, the teacher realized that one of the students was hiding the container of writing utensils in his sweatshirt and had to get him to reluctantly return it. This took a few minutes. During that incident one student asked if I'm observing the kids or the teacher and the teacher said that I'm observing everything. Finally, the class got back to the lab and the teacher asked the kid who had taken the container to read. He finally read, but not willingly. Because nobody was willing to read, the teacher skipped a lot of the reading (the background info part of the lab) and skipped straight to the procedure.

In the first part of the lab they were instructed to check each other's reflexes. Chaos broke out when they were instructed to have one person sit on the desk while his partner hit his knee. While the teacher was with one group, the other group was throwing and breaking a pencil. After they tested their reflexes, they were supposed to answer three questions about what they had just done. Two students were saying "yuck foo" and "fother mucker," thinking it was funny. The next part of the lab was about testing reflexes. In order to do this, the students had to drop a ruler (starting at 0 cm) between their partners fingers and the partner had to catch it. Whatever number they caught it on they recorded and after five attempts, they averaged the five numbers and got their reflex score. Two boys got competitive, wanting to have the quickest reflexes. I noticed that nobody was completely following the rules because they weren't keeping their arm on the table, but the teacher did not correct them. One student's five attempts added up to 50 and he insisted that his average was 5. He was clearly wrong, but quite certain of himself.

He said, "I'm way better than everybody." After him bragging for a few minutes, the teacher finally realized he was wrong (after he said that his score added up to 50 about five times).

The same student I mentioned above was not cooperating with anything the teacher said, so she threatened to write him up, so he finally sat in his seat for a few minutes. A man came in and asked for one of the kids who happens to have been the best behaved kid all period. One of the other students tried doing a fake drug deal. He had his hood up and put a marker up his sleeve and went to another kid and whispered, "wanna buy something?" Finally, they returned their attention back to the lad; the teacher read some questions aloud and the students responded together.

The resource teacher was absent again. There was a sign on her door for her students to report to room 313. The person standing at the door of room 313 said that the teacher left no work for them, so they essentially have to sit in "time-out" for that period. When I asked in the office what the general policy is for absent teachers, the secretary said that Ms. Brenagin is a special case because she is the resource room teacher, so there is nobody who fills in for her. Normally, if another teacher is out, then a T.A. will run the class or, if the teacher is going to be out for a period of time, then a substitute will come in.

Amanda Cohen
November 30th, 2012
Class Level: Mixed
Class Subject: GED

School: BOCES

When I arrived this morning, the teacher was cleaning mouse droppings off of her desk and table. I sat at a table to just observe today rather than working one on one with some students. The TA came in a few minutes later and was walking around asking how everyone is doing individually. The students were silent. The teacher was showing me how dirty the room is and said that they have to do a lot of the cleaning themselves. When she was done, she started making rounds as well. This was the first day when I was able to look around and notice that the teacher would sit next to a student and go over work with him or her. At one point, the TA showed the teacher a paper and smiled; the teacher then said “you did it buddy” to one of the students (he did well on a practice test).

When the announcer came on to do the pledge, everyone stood up, but I only heard the teachers reciting it. He also announced the lunch menu for the day, a historical even that happened on November 30, 1972, NFL scores, weather, and that it’s the last day of November, and finally, that Christmas is right around the corner; he quoted a Santa Clause song.

There was one girl with her head down on her book (looked like she was sleeping) and I realized later that she is blatantly pregnant. The teacher sat with one student and showed him how much he improved on his practice test compared to the test he took in September. She sounded enthusiastic and excited for him. She said that he is almost ready for the test; he just needs to “push out some math first.” When she was leaving him, the teacher told the student to do some work and then she’ll come back to him. The TA took a student to the bathroom, but before she left,

she checked to see if anyone else had to go as well. One girl walked in at 9:33 A.M. (an hour late). Her friend (from across the room) told her that she's late and she replied by saying, "I know, but at least I came today." One thing I noticed about this late student is that she was wearing a lot of make up. When the teacher was done with the student that she was currently working with, she went over to the late girl to try to figure out why she was so late. I heard her ask if it was because of boyfriend problem, but I couldn't really hear the conversation, but it ended with the teacher saying, "you could have gotten here earlier than 9:30, but I'm glad you're here- haven't seen you since Tuesday.

The teacher told me that she always keeps band-aids and cough drops and simple things like that in her desk because they can take care of those things on their own. It saves the time and energy that would require walking them down to the nurse's office. Then, the teacher had to run out with a girl who wasn't feeling well. She was complaining of a pounding headache and vomited. Apparently, she has been sick for three weeks now and has thrown up multiple times during class, but hasn't seen a doctor yet. Another boy wasn't feeling well either, but the nurse couldn't give him any Tylenol. At this point, the teacher walked around with a candy bag, but not too many students wanted chocolate.

The teacher and TA started doing organizational work (putting papers in binders) for the teacher's afternoon junior high math class. One of the GED students asked why the students don't do that themselves and the teacher said that she tried having them do it last year, but the papers ended up all over the room. It's much more neat and organized for her to do it herself. When finished, the teacher started

going around to the students individually again. She was checking answers to the work that the students had been doing today and then would ask if they need help with anything. Then the teacher started making phone calls to parents. She showed me the calendar she keeps, documenting every time she calls a student's parents or talks to a counselor about a student. Apparently, if a student has been absent for 20 days, then she has to notify that student's district, because most of the time the district will drop him, if he hasn't been attending, because they get billed every quarter to pay for each student. She believes that it's not always the parents' fault if the kid isn't showing, especially if he is over the age of 18.