**Introduction**

As a part of the Literature for Young Adults course, I was assigned an English classroom to sit in on over the course of the semester. I was appointed to Ms. B’s senior English classroom in a rural Pennsylvania community. I was thrilled with this placement because I hope someday to be a high school English teacher. However, I was a bit nervous that the small age gap would interfere with my professional studies. I sat in on the English class for a total of six sessions expanding over the course of two months.

Ms. B was a very influential mentor through her realistic approach to teaching. She conveyed understanding that there is no single set of rules that will help teachers implement effective learning. Rather, she analyzed her students in terms of their individual qualities, their social circles, and their lives outside of the educational discourse. From observing Ms. B I learned how to gain student respect by bringing humor into the classroom,

During my visits, I chose one particular student to observe, Sarah. To learn more about Sarah I conducted three interviews, one with her, one with Ms. B, and one with Sarah’s Social Studies teacher. I also read over and analyzed one of Sarah’s essays that exemplified her average work quality. Each of these artifacts is followed up by an annotation that explains how I perceived this to represent Sarah as an individual and a student.

Through this process, I have learned a great deal about education. By focusing on the needs of one particular student, I understand how each student deserves to be appreciated as an individual. It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure instruction appeals to her students’ variety of learning styles and interests.

**Part I: Observing a Student**

**OBSERVATIONS**

**Day 1: 2/22/12**

Today was the first meeting with my mentor teacher, Ms. B. In the half hour we met before classes started, we discussed how the semester would unfold for us. We chose to meet every Wednesday for 1st Period. She then explained to me the setting of her classroom and the students in it. She used stereotypes to cluster them together, such as “jocks” and “stoners”, which surprised me coming from an experienced middle aged teacher. I always believed that teachers somehow overlooked these segregations in students, but now I realize they too are aware of the social realms in schools. I believe Ms. B used this terminology to convey the variety of students in her class and not to provide me with any preconceived notions. However, I was still very curious to see if these judgments played any role in her teaching.

During our early meeting, Ms. B also conveyed to me that she runs her classroom in a college-like style since this is the end of the students' high school career. I believe most other teachers let students slack off knowing they are graduating, so Ms. B is wise in actually adjusting differently to the end of the year. After meeting with Ms. B I am looking forward to observing her class and analyzing the relationship between her and her students.

**Day 2:** **2/29/12**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Observation** | **Interpretation** |
| 8:50 | Sub passes out a reading assignment to the class, Sarah responds with “thank you” | Sarah seems to be polite and un-phased by the change in routine |
| 9:00 | Most students are disengaged and rowdy. One boy is walking from desk to desk. Sarah is one of the few that seems to be reading. | Sarah is not taking advantage of the sub’s leniency, but rather quietly completing the task, possibly meaning she has an introverted personality |
| 9:03 | Sub says the students can work with partners. Most of the students take him up on this and start to look over the assignment. Sarah continues to work alone. | The sub is trying to motivate the students by allowing them to work together, appealing to the interpersonal learners. Sarah however displays intrapersonal learning skills. |
| 9:20 | Sarah packs up her materials and turns to talk with others | Sarah is only social once her assignment is complete |

I intended my first day of observation to be of a typical class in Ms. B’s first period English. However, this was far from the case. Ms. B contacted me to say she would be out sick and I had the choice of whether or not I wanted to still come in. I knew beginning my observations with a substitute would probably give me false impressions of some of the students, but I thought it was a good opportunity to compare and contrast class behavior. I believe it is important as a teacher to understand how your students behave under a substitutes’ supervision so you know how to prepare for the day.

By completing an observation chart, it was easy to see how disengaged most of the students were with the work, which is why Sarah stood out to me. Most students took advantage of the sub’s presence. One student even yelled he could not focus because he is a "pot head", something I believe might not happen with Ms. B present. During this time Sarah paid no notice to the distractions around her. Eventually the sub got the entire class to concentrate on their assigned reading for about 20 minutes before they lost focus again for the remainder of the class.

**Day 3: 3/07/12**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Observation** | **Interpretation** |
| **8:45** | **Sarah comes in and sits at her desk while other students socialize.** | **Again, she is expressing introverted behavior.** |
| **8:47** | **She tells another girl, “I like your shoes,” which helps her become a part of the conversation.** | **Sarah is attempting to socialize with her peers through basic means of entering the conversation.** |
| **8:52** | **Another class joins Ms. B’s for breakfast. Sarah waves to a girl who then pulls up a desk to Sarah. The two girls chat excitedly.** | **It is interesting to see Sarah with a friend outside of the class. Sarah may not have any close friends in the class which contributes to her introverted behavior.** |
| **9:15** | **Ms. B says to Sarah’s friend “you should be very proud of Sarah, she has really improved” and gives Sarah a high five. Sarah changes the subject when Ms. B walks away** | **Sarah seems very modest about Ms. B’s praise. She does not elaborate for her friend, which makes me wonder what it could be about.** |
| **9:21** | **In the midst of a conversation, Sarah says to classmates, “I wish I could play guitar.”** | **This makes me wonder about Sarah’s hobbies outside of the classroom.** |

Yet again, this is another unique class. Upon my arrival, Ms. B informs me that the students will be enjoying breakfast in celebration of the end of a unit. I sigh at the fact that this may not give me any great insight into Sarah as a student, however I begin my note-taking regardless. I watch as Sarah socializes with her friend while munching on fruit, yogurt, and bacon. The peak of the day’s observations was of the conversation between Ms. B and the two girls. Upon the conclusion of the class, Ms. B fills me in on why she is so proud of Sarah. A summary of what Ms. B told me is this:

Earlier in the school year, Sarah was absent about 2 to 3 days a week. This inevitably led to Sarah slipping behind in many of her classes, which she came to Ms. B to talk about. When Sarah turned to tears, Ms. B recognized that she needed support, not a lecture. By showing Sarah she cared, Ms. B convinced her to start coming to school on an everyday basis. Since this turning point, Sarah began coming to school on a regular basis; she hasn't missed a day in two months!

**Observation Analysis**

In the classroom setting, Sarah exhibits introverted behavior and intrapersonal learning skills. For a teacher, it is essential to observe these character traits early on so that you can be sure to meet the needs of your students. For a student like Sarah, a teacher should respect her wish for privacy while still encouraging peer interactions, which is a tricky scale to balance. As a future teacher who enjoys interpersonal instruction, designing activities for Sarah will be a challenge.

During my early observations of Sarah, I concluded that she would most benefit from individual or partner activities. These types of lessons are usually geared towards learning through reflection. For Sarah, and all young adults at that, reflection is a necessary means of discovering who you are. Because of Sarah’s reserved behavior, I thought she would enjoy education more if she was encouraged to relate with texts in her own ways, without pressure from peers or strict instruction.

Later in my observations, Ms. B helped me understand that teachers don’t just have to consider classroom behaviors; they have to understand the reasoning behind these behaviors. Learning about Sarah’s previous attendance issue, I am sure it is connected to her introverted personality. This information helped me realize that there is just as much importance on classroom material as there is on classroom structure. I plan to explore possible reasons for Sarah’s absences in order to plan a unit that will benefit her unique situation. To do this, however, I will have to be extra sensitive about what Sarah is willing to share with me.

**INTERVIEWS**

**Student Interview**

1. **What is your best subject?**

Art, it is easy because there aren’t a lot of rules for it.

1. **What is your least favorite subject?**

Math, numbers just confuse me.

1. **How would you say this English class has positively or negatively affected you?**

Positively, because it teaches me philosophy and ways to successfully get through hard times in life. Ms. B isn’t just an English teacher she’s a personal influence on us too.

1. **What do you like to read outside of school?**

I’m not much of a reader, maybe the newspaper or magazine sometimes.

1. **What are your favorite types of things to write?**

I’m not a fan of writing… at all.

1. **What are some activities you like to do outside of school?**

I babysit my two baby brothers sometimes to help out. I also like to spend time with family and friends.

1. **What is your family like? Siblings? Pets?**

I’m the oldest child. I have one sister, one brother, and two half-brothers. I like being the oldest, but sometimes it’s hard to know you have that much influence on others. It’s really difficult too since my mom just had two babies and I’m not that close with her husband.

1. **What are your plans for after graduation?**

I will attend Kutztown University and major in psychology

**English Teacher Interview**

1. **What type of learner is the student? (Visual, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, etc…)**

Kinesthetic, she does best with projects and activity based work.

1. **What is her best piece of work this year?**

She did very well on the short story take home test.

1. **What is an area she still needs to improve on?**

She is very introverted which I think hurts her since our class is very discussion based.

1. **Have you ever had to contact the student’s parents? If so, describe the situation.**

No, Sarah and I worked it out without needing me to call her parents.

1. **Have you ever sought out advice from other faculty members on how to best help this student?**

I have discussed with other faculty how Sarah used to miss 2 or 3 days a week to seek their advice on the matter. Now she is coming to school almost every day.

1. **What is your most memorable “Ah-hah” teacher moment with the student?**

In a nutshell- She came to me for advice on grades. I told her she needed to come to school. She cried, but now realizes the importance of getting an education.

1. **How do you reward the student for her improvements over the year?**

I tell her friends to give her a high five, so that she knows I’m not the only one recognizing her improvements. I also give her verbal praise.

1. **As advice to future teachers, what would you say is the best method of maintaining valuable yet appropriate student/teacher relationships?**

Show respect and talk to students one-on-one. Discipline students when needed, but at the same time know when a student needs a bit of leeway. Pat a kid on the back or high five, say hello outside of the classroom.

**Social Studies Teacher Interview**

1. **What type of learner is the student? (Visual, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, etc…)**

Kinesthetic, she does better when the activity involves mobility.

1. **What is her best piece of work this year?**

She did a great job on the simulation project on how a bill becomes a law.

1. **What is an area she still needs to improve on?**

She needs to be more consistent in getting her work done and done on time.

1. **Have you ever had to contact the student’s parents? If so, describe the situation.**

No, her grades are good enough that I never had to make a contact.

1. **Have you ever sought out advice from other faculty members on how to best help this student?**

No, usually I will speak directly to Sarah if she starts to slip or not get work done.

1. **What is your most memorable “Ah-hah” teacher moment with the student?**

I was getting frustrated with Sarah’s attendance issues, as were most of her teachers. After Ms. B’s talk with her, I noticed she started coming around more. It was one of those first days I saw her enjoying my class and participating. That felt good.

1. **How do you reward the student for her improvements over the year?**

Usually, I let her work with friends on certain assignments and projects. Verbal rewards always help too.

1. **As advice to future teachers, what would you say is the best method of maintaining valuable yet appropriate student/teacher relationships?**

Make sure you show your students respect and you will receive it. Do not be afraid to pull them aside and have a talk if there are any problems occurring. Be flexible at times. Use humor once in a while, you’ll be surprised how much it opens the door for communication.

**Interview Analysis**

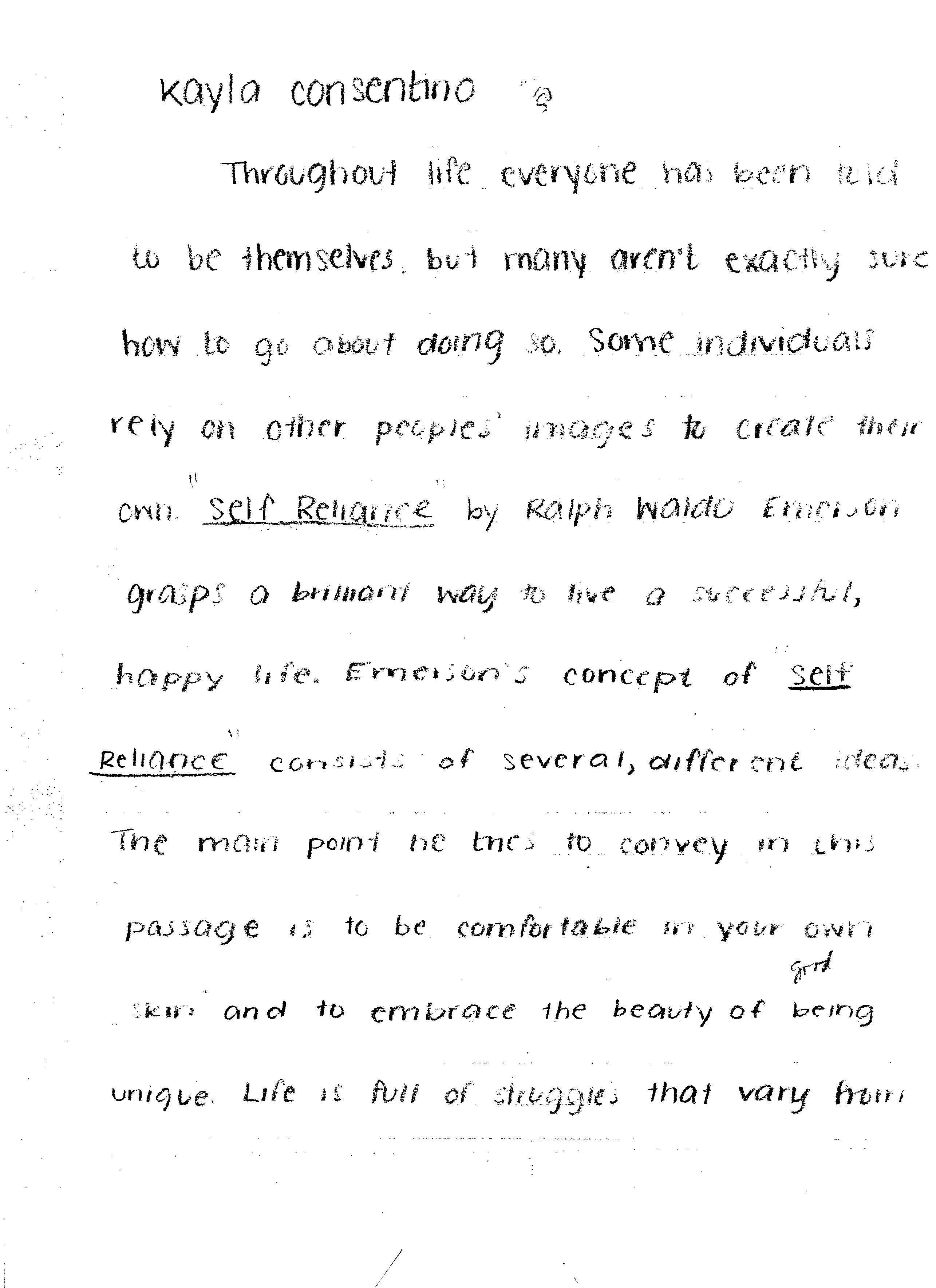
I focused my interviews around trying to learn more about Sarah’s attendance issue from earlier in the year. The interviews are not a verbatim account, but are an accurate representation of the discussions that took place.

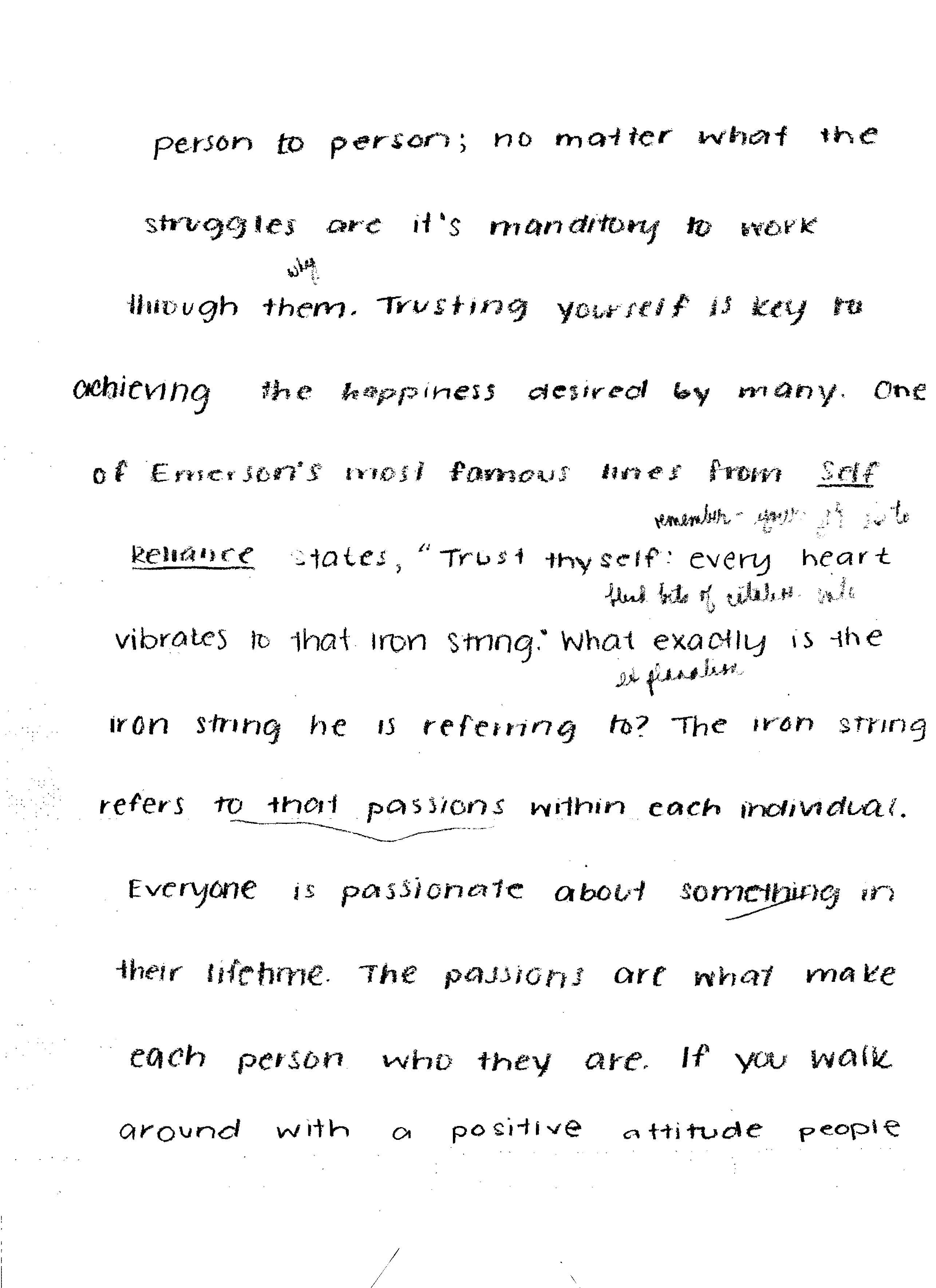
I conducted Sarah’s interview first. I did this so Sarah’s interview would be the primary source, without the influence of outside opinions. At no point did Sarah mention her attendance problem; however she did provide me with many possible reasons for it. A major shift in family structure is a difficult experience, especially for a teenager trying to find her place in the world. Sarah feeling like an outsider in her own home could be directly related to her introverted behavior in the classroom Sarah needs help finding her identity in a world of chaos.

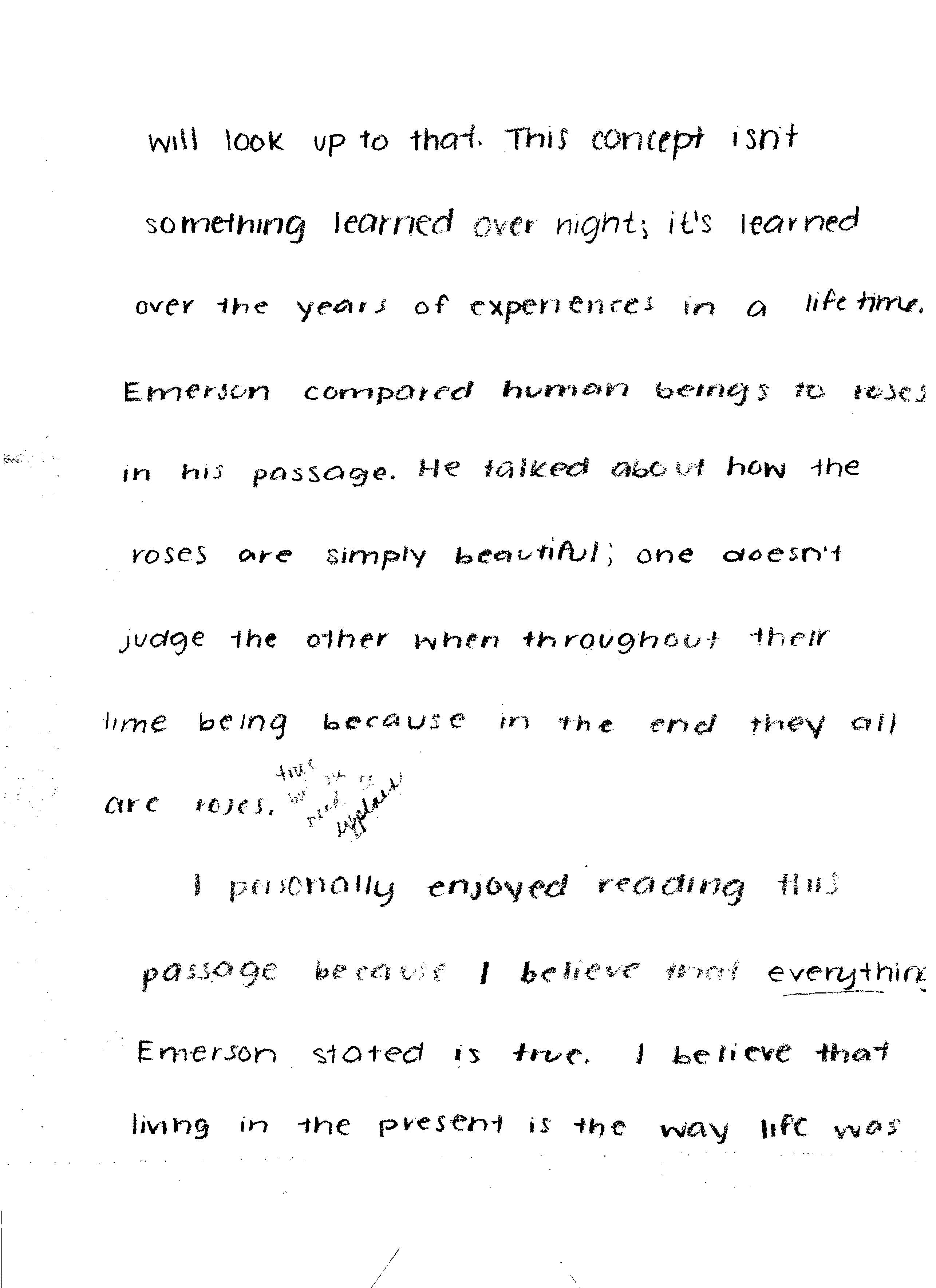
Ms. B seems to recognize Sarah’s need for stability, and tries to provide her with that in her role as teacher. The teacher believes all students deserve the chance at an education, despite previous setbacks. By acknowledging Sarah as an individual rather than just a student, Ms. B is encouraging Sarah to have pride in herself. Ms. B then directed to me her colleague, Sarah’s Social Students teacher, who seems to have a different take on Sarah’s case. His views on Sarah are that she does not succeed in his classroom, but does not analyze what could be wrong outside of the classroom. This shows that his sense of responsibility is confined within the walls of his classroom.

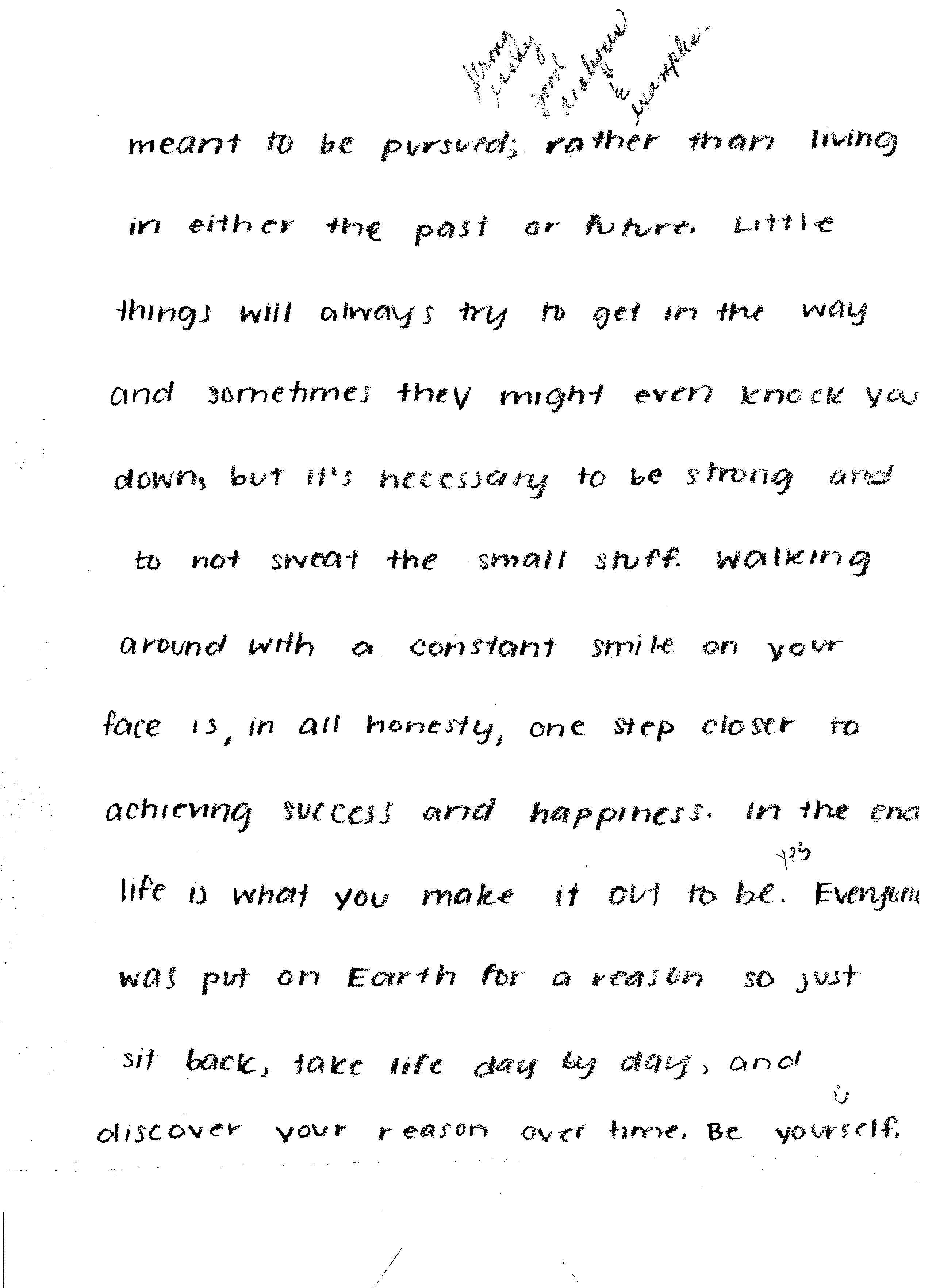
The interviews have further provoked thought on how I would effectively design instruction around Sarah. Most importantly, I think the material should be centered on family. Many modern families undergo similar shifts as Sarah’s, and the teacher observations prove its heavy impact on students. Yet, school texts rarely address the matter.

STUDENT WORK









Student Work Analysis

Sarah’s assignment was appropriately about self-identity. After reading Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self Reliance,” the class had to write an essay on how it reflected on one’s position in society. Sarah’s essay was graded as a 45 out of 50, overall a 90%. However, Ms. B informed me that this essay would not typically have scored this high had it been from another student. On the surface, this may come off as bias grading but Ms. B’s explanation justified her reasoning. Again demonstrating respect for her students as individuals, Ms. B understand Sarah needed extra encouragement during this time. If she had scored Sarah’s paper brutally, Sarah could easily sink back into her old habits. I agree that it is important for Sarah to feel that her efforts are being acknowledged and rewarded.

The content of the essay itself is also quite interesting to read. I especially like Sarah’s comment, “Trusting yourself is key to achieving the happiness desired by many.” It is important that Sarah understand only she can control her successes or failures. I think this is very relevant to her changing family dynamics, because she needs to understand she does not have to change just because her family does. I also enjoy Sarah’s comment, “Walking around with a constant smile on your face is, in all honesty, one step closer to achieving success and happiness.” I believe this is very relevant to the text I chose for Sarah, Fun Home, because it spins a comical light on many family struggles. I believe Sarah understanding of Emerson’s message of self-reliance, and my instruction can further this by applying this theory to another text. Together, the texts will help Sarah understand the meaning of self-reliance, and further help her become comfortable in her own identity.

**Part II: Designing Instruction**

**Rationale:**

For addressing my student Sarah, I have chosen to study the text *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel. I have chosen this text for multiple reasons based on the observations of Sarah and the interactions I have had with her and her teachers. Most importantly, I will be focusing on this text’s exploration if identity, and how family has an impact on its construction. Over the course of my observation, I recognize that Sarah is a very introverted student. Through my interviews, I have discovered that Sarah has had severe issues with attendance and her desire to learn. After speaking with Sarah herself, I realize this may be a reflection of her shifting family. With a fairly new step-father, and twin baby half-brothers, Sarah could feel lost in her own home. With her chaotic surroundings, it could be difficult for Sarah to clearly define who she is and who she wants to be.

For these reasons, *Fun Home* is the basis of the unit I have designed for Sarah. The text is a memoir depicting Bechdel’s own childhood upbringing, taking place in rural Pennsylvania, a setting that is strikingly similar to Sarah’s. The texts theme revolves around Bechdel discovering herself within and outside of her utmost abnormal family. The text explores issues such as gender, sexual orientation, suicide, and dysfunctional family life, all topics that are relatable to many teenage readers. Considering Sarah prefers reading materials such as newspapers and magazines, Bechdel’s comic book will appeal to her instantly. On the surface, it seems like a text unlike most that are required in a classroom setting. Filled with more pictures than text, I believe most students would find it appealing, especially Sarah. However, the lessons inscribed behind the comics are essential to Sarah’s search for identity.

There are multiple aspects of this text that may seem inappropriate for a classroom setting. However, I argue that the text as a whole is educationally valuable, and every component can be attributed to that value. For starters, it may be debated that, as a comic book, Fun Home is challenging enough for seniors in high school. However, I argue that students need to be exposed to a variety of reading material, not strictly novels and short stories. If students are aware of the different types of reading material, they are more likely to take interest in one. Secondly, the adult content of the text may provoke debate. As seniors in high school, students are approaching life outside of the classroom, a life that can’t be screened by teachers. By introducing controversial material in the classroom, we can also teach to students to discover the educational value behind the text. Otherwise, we are sending the message that these texts exist only in terms of their obscenities. The purpose of Fun House is to draw on real societal and personal issues in relation to a person’s creation of identity.

**Big Question:**

How does family influence one’s identity?

The English subject is not restricted to teaching students to read and write. It is about teaching students to apply these tools in all aspects of their life. For this unit, it means applying these tools to the idea of family. The purpose of this question is to encourage students to analyze how the role of family impacts the creation of one’s identity. Through the third person perspective of Bechdel’s family, students will be able to better understand their role in their own families.

**Assessment:**

Throughout the unit, students will keep a journal of the daily activities that occur in their family life. In addition to these daily write ups, I will occasionally ask students to write in the journals based on a prompt I give them, based on either their families or Bechdel’s I will ask for these entries in a variety of forms, such as short story, poem, or narrative. The journals do not have to be shared with the class, but the teacher will check for completion.

The final assessment will be a mini scrapbook of the student’s family life made up of a variety of media. In addition to pictures and illustrations, I will ask the students to resort to their journal entries. In order to align the assessment with the text, I will require students to apply some of the journal entries based on *Fun Home* to their family’s scrapbook, including an example of comic booking. This further helps students understand the overall theme of the book: the influence of family on the identity.

For Sarah, this assessment is especially crucial to her changing family life. This ongoing project will help her define what family means to her. Whether it is through blood relations, household members, or who shows emotional support. Having a visual representation of family will help Sarah adjust to her changing family and understand her role in it.

**Lesson 1 (50 Minutes): Family Ties**

Objectives:

Students will learn about comic book techniques to understand that communication is not

restricted to words

Students will create comics in order to apply their knowledge of communication through

images

Students will place themselves in the comics in order to relate to the texts’ characters and

understand how characters are dependent on one another

Materials:

*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* text

List of Words for each group

Journals

Motivational Device (5 minutes):

Each student will be asked to choose a scene from the text they thought significantly portrayed the idea of family. In their journals, students will write down five separate words they feel describe the scene they chose. I will ask a few students to share their words and ask them why they chose them.

Activity:

Part I (25 minutes): The motivational device will facilitate a discussion on how comic books use images to convey meaning. We will go over elements such as character development, use of space, and emotions drawn from shapes. As we cover each element I will ask students to share examples from the section of *Fun House* they chose that correlate to them.

Part II (15 minutes): Students will then break into pairs and each pair is given a list of five words. With these words, the pairs will create their own comic strip, using themselves as the main characters. The students cannot use words in their comic, but rather must depend on the elements covered in Part I to incorporate their list of words into their story line. Each pair will then combine with another and they will take turns interpreting each other’s story lines.

Closure (5 minutes):

In their journals, students will analyze how their comic’s story line was equally dependent on both characters. Further, they will then explain how this shows that the characters are also dependent on each other.

*This lesson will help Sarah understand how people work together towards a common goal. This is essential in a family unit. It will also help Sarah learn different forms of communication, which is very important for an introverted personality.*

**Lesson 2 (50 minutes): Family Traits**

Objectives:

Students will create a venn diagram in order to understand the influence Alison’s family has on her character

Students will create a venn diagram to visually represent their own family relationships in

order to understand how family members influence one another

Materials:

Youtube for Goofy Movie Clip

Poster/ Markers

*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic text*

Journals

Motivational Device (10 minutes):

I will show a clip from A Goofy Movie. I will tell students to remember how the story is dependent on both characters. With partners students will fill out a venn diagram on how Goofy and Max are similar and different. We will share as a class.

Activity (30 minutes):

Students will break up into five groups. Each group will focus on one relationship Alison has with another character in the text. On poster paper, each group will create a venn diagram showing the traits Alison and this character share and which they do not. They will support their responses with examples from the text. Students will also have to write a blurb as to whether they believe the similarities are due to being family or not and why. Each group will share with the class.

Closure (10 minutes):

Students will pick one family member to create their own venn diagram with and illustrate it in their journal. They will be instructed to describe character traits rather than physical traits. Using these differences and similarities as support, the student will explain how this family member has been a positive or negative influence on their lives.

*This activity will expose Sarah to different types of family structures. It will help her understand how her family changes are similar to the characters that we analyze. This will encourage Sarah to relate to the text and discover meaning below the surface.*

**Lesson 3 (50 minutes): Role Models**

Objectives:

Students will write letters to understand how family members to understand the

importance of good role models

Students will write letters to help them relate to the characters of Fun House

Students will convey their understanding through images in order to display a transmedial

understanding of the text

Materials:

*Fun Home: A Tragicomic*

Journals

Magazines/ poster

Computer

Motivational Device (10 minutes):

In their journal, students will write a letter to one of their family members that they consider to be a role model. The letter will include a specific time/event that this person demonstrated admirable qualities. They letter will also include how the recipient has been a positive influence on the student’s own character.

Activity:

Part I (15 minutes): Students will break up into groups of 3 or 4. In their groups, they will choose one family member that has been a positive influence on Bechdel’s character. Using evidence from the text as support, the students will write a letter from Bechdel’s perspective honoring the chosen family member and explaining how they have been a good influence. This activity will prove to be a challenge, since Bechdel struggles with many of her family relationships. However, this activity will encourage students to analyze both the positive and negative influences of each character.

Part II (20 minutes): Each group will visually represent their letter through another form of media. They will be able to choose from magazine clippings, clip art, body theatre, or a form of their choice (upon approval). Each group will present their Trans-medial depiction while reading their written letter.

Closure (5 minutes):

In their journals, students will choose a family member they sometimes struggle with. They can describe this struggle if they choose to. However, their main goal is to write about the positive aspects of this person.

*This activity will shed light on the positive influences of family, despite hard ships. Sarah will begin to understand changes are hard, but it does not mean they are entirely negative experiences. It will also help Sarah understand the various ways people can express themselves.*