**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 probably begin letting the 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**

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 still thought it was a good opportunity to compare and contrast the class. 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 the students were with the work. During the first half hour of the class, students mostly socialized amongst each other. One student even yelled he could not focus because he is a "pot head", something I believe might not happen with his regular teacher there. Eventually the sub got the class to concentrate on their assigned reading for about 20 minutes before they lost focus again. I decided to use this time to choose which student I would observe during the semester. I decided on one girl who was dressed comfortably in sweatpants and a hoodie, who I will refer to as Sarah. I chose her because she seemed quiet and reserved during this time where most students were chatty. While Sarah seemed to be trying to concentrate on her work, she did lift her head once in a while to take part in short conversations. From my observation of Sarah, I assume that she is an introverted learner. I base this on the fact that she seemed intent on reading quietly and stayed in her seat for the entire class, unlike other students.

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

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 the student I chose to observe, however I begin my note-taking regardless. As Sarah walks to her desk, she tosses her backpack down and takes her seat quietly. Again, the student is dressed relaxingly in sneakers and sweatpants. After a few minutes of silence I hear her initiate conversation with a peer nearby: "I like your shoes" she says politely. This gave good lee way into Sara being a part of the conversation. As another class comes in to join Ms. B for breakfast, Sara is pleasantly surprised one of her friends will be joining for the day. They pull their desks close to each other and chat quietly while they munch on fruit, yogurt, and bacon. About five minutes into the breakfast feast I overhear an interesting conversation between Ms. B and the two girls.

Ms. B: "You should be really proud of Sarah, she has worked really hard lately"

Friend (smiling at Sarah): "That's good to hear"

Ms. B (with hand on Sarah's shoulder): "I am very proud of you again"

Sarah provides a modest "thank you" in response.

After overhearing this conversation, I could only help but wonder what Ms. B is so proud about. The girls continue to chat for the remainder of class. At one point, I overhear Sarah wishing she could play the guitar. This makes me curious what types of interests Sarah takes up outside of school. Upon the conclusion of the class, Ms. B comes over to talk to me about my observations and her input on the day. I told her I had begun observing Sarah and that I would really enjoy interviewing her. She was thrilled to say the least, but for reasons that came as a surprise.

Ms. B then went on to fill me in on the struggles Sarah and gone through over the course of the year. Earlier in the school year, she was missing about 2 to 3 times a week. Because of this, she was inevitably slipping behind in all of her school work. Eventually Sarah came to talk to Ms. B about how upset she was with the way the year panned out, and Ms. B's response was far from stern. She said she could tell that Sarah just needed a support figure to help her get to school and get back on track. She convinced Sarah to start coming to school more often, telling her it was not that bad. By the end of the conversation, Sarah was in tears and Ms. B played the motherly role that the situation called for. After this turning point, Sarah began coming to school on a regular basis; she hasn't missed a day in two months! This situation has made me a little nervous about how an interview may be if questions get too sensitive. However, I am glad I am fortunate to have a student in a unique situation that I can hopefully explore during my observations.

**INTERVIEWS & ANNOTATIONS**

**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

*Annotation: After hearing about Sarah’s severe attendance problem, I could only help but wonder what was going on her life that this was happening. Here, I believe Sarah has provided me with multiple possibilities. A major shift in family structure is a difficult experience, especially a teenager trying to figure her place in the world. It seems that Sarah has to find her niche in the world before she will feel fully comfortable in her own skin. Until this happens, the pressure of being the oldest child will continue to build up on her.*

**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.

*Annotation: I can’t be sure how much the teacher knows about Sarah’s personal life. But it seems that she is giving the student a stable environment regardless. The teacher believes all students deserve the chance at an education, despite previous setbacks. Rather than continuously discipline Sarah, Ms. B rewards her for her progress thus far.*

**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.

*Annotation: The social studies teacher carries a friendly persona and seems to carry a respectable relationship with his students. However, it seems that he does not feel that his duties extend beyond the classroom. 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. He appreciates Ms. B’s efforts, but does not feel the need to make his own.*

**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. As a senior in high school, this could largely be due to her trying to explore who she is as a person. Through my interviews with students, 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. Children are often influenced from their family, their teachers, and their peers. With the staple of this influence in chaos, it could be difficult for Sarah to clearly define who she is and who she wants to be.

Considering Sarah prefers reading materials such as newspapers and magazines, Bechdel’s comic book will appeal to her instantly. From the outside, it seems like a text unlike most that are required in a classroom setting. Filled with pictures rather than text, I believe most students would find it appealing. However, the lessons she takes away from it will be everlasting. 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 text explores issues such as gender, sexual orientation, suicide, and dysfunctional family life, all topics that are relatable to many teenage readers.

While some of the text’s themes may seem inappropriate for a classroom setting, I argue that they are all of educational value. As seniors in high school, the students are ready to be prepared for life outside of a sheltered classroom. Each element of the story that can be perceived as inappropriate will be addressed in an educational light. The purpose of the text is to draw on societal and personal issues and teach the students the significance of their identity.

**Big Question:**

How does family influence one’s identity?

**Assessment:**

Throughout the unit, students will keep a journal of the daily activities that occur in their family life. 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, including pictures and short pieces of writing.

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

Objectives:

Students will create comics to understand how meaning can be conveyed through images

Students will interpret each other’s comics to understand the importance of perception

Students will examine relationships in the text and their own lives to understand the

impact family has

Materials:

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic text

List of Words for each group

Journals

Motivational Device (5 minutes):

Students will participate in a Think, Pair, Share. Each student will pick one family member and must write down three words that describe his/her relationship with that person. They will then turn to the person next to them and share who they chose and their words. Various students will share with the class.

Activity:

Part I (25 minutes): Independently, students will create a short comic strip of one memory they have with the person they chose in the motivational device. The comic must represent at least one of the words the student has chosen in the motivational device. This will help students understand how meaning can be conveyed through images. Students will then break up into pairs. Without speaking to one another, the students will write out their interpretation of their partner’s comic. They will then share with one another.

Part II (15 minutes): Students will then break into five groups. Each group will be given a list of words that can be used to describe relationships. Each group will use their words to decide which of Alison’s relationships they best represent. They will then choose a scene from the book to support their choice. Each group will share with the class.

Closure (5 minutes):

Students will write in their journal how the relationship they chose in the motivational device is similar to one relationship Alison has.

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

Objectives:

Students will create a venn diagram to understand Alison’s relationships

Students will create a venn diagram to understand the impact of their relationships

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. 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 must also write why they believe they share similar characteristics.

**Lesson 3 (50 minutes): Home is where the Heart is**

**\*\*\*\*STILL IN REVISION**

Motivational Device (5 minutes):

In their journal, students will draw a picture of their home. Whether it be the home they currently live in, or one they used to live in is up to the student.

Activity:

Part I: Students will be split into five groups. Each group is assigned a scene from the text that takes place at Fun Home. The students will decide if the scene sheds a positive or negative light on the house and how the scene affected Alison.

Closure:

Each student writes in their journal their favorite memory of the home they drew in the motivational device.