

Teaching gives great experiences and a wide view of the world if teachers branch out. I have held four major teaching positions in my life, and each assignment shaped my views in its own unique style. I started in a predominately-black school on the south side of metro Atlanta, and I currently teach in a coveted, white, suburban school. Every school had its own issues, challenges, and successes.

Located in the north metro-Atlanta area, Buford, Georgia includes a predominately-white population, a large Hispanic population, and a black population including middle and low class residents. Buford Middle school is beautiful. There are signs all over giving students encouragement. When you walk down the hall, flags from countries all over the world hang from the ceiling and students try to identify the countries of each flag. My technology lab is warm and inviting covered in carpet, career posters, and student work in full color. The field is perfectly landscaped and includes an outdoor classroom. The library has comfortable chairs for students to enjoy while reading. As described by Gollnick and Chinn (2013), residents view education “as a way to enhance one’s economic status” (p. 82). The schools are central to the culture of the town, and many parents are involved with the day-to-day operations of the school. I coordinate STEM day each year, and I have parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds volunteer to help with the day. As a result, Newsweek recognized our school system as one of America’s Best Schools. Kozol (2005) noted, “A stream of water flowed down one of the main stairwells on a rainy afternoon, and green fungus molds growing in the office where the students went for counseling” (p.1). This school cannot offer a warm, inviting environment. Kozol (2005) also described, “A sixth-grade class packed into a single room that had no windows” (p. 1). Current building codes require all rooms to have a window. A window may have a small impact, but the lack of a window can make a room feel like a prison. The teacher evaluation system in Georgia includes evaluating the classroom environment because the environment is important to encourage student achievement.

I worked at Conyers Middle School one year when I returned to the country in 2009. There was fight each day, many students exhibited rude behavior, and the administration did not support discipline procedures in most classes. As a result, the school ran like a prison allowing the inmates only small amounts of free time. Kozol (2005) quoted a student talking about bathroom breaks, “Students are not animals, but even animals need to relieve themselves sometimes” (p. 1). Students want to learn, and have a great school. Kozol (2005) quoted

another student who wished, “that this school was the most beautiful school in the whole why world” (p. 1). Gollnick and Chinn (2013) described another class, which “includes those who cannot work or find work sporadically” (p. 76). Many of the parents of Conyers Middle belonged to this class. Many of the students had to fight a hard home life, and a school with undefined boundaries. Many of these students only received respect from their teachers, and they did not easily trust adults. This climate and environment did not encourage student achievement, and many of the student did not pass standardizes test nor make passing grades in class.

Gollnick and Chinn (2013) explained people in the lower class “are blamed for hardships because of a lack of middle class values and behaviors” (p. 76). Kozol (2005) quoted a child stated, “We don't have no gardens, no Music or Art, and no fun places to play” (p. 1). If education is the key, then how can society blame a child who cannot receive a quality education from his or her school? Education is not equal, and I had more resources for class on the south side of Atlanta than I do in Buford. The government gave the low-income schools more money, but the blame for being low-income created a negative environment. Many of the teachers could not use the technology in the classroom, and teachers wasted these resources because of a lack of training. Teachers need to be able to use resources, and students must not feel as if they are charity cases for receiving resources for success. I had a new student three weeks ago and he wore the same clothes for the first week. He was withdrawn, and he definitely had a hygiene problem. One day, another teacher told me she was pulling the student from my class because quote “we have to get this baby some more clothes from the school closet.” The school gave him enough clothes for a week of school, and did not expect anything from him. Since then, the little boy participates more in class, and smiles. Society cannot blame the lower class for requiring more resources to participate as an equal member of society.

Kozol (2005) interviewed a student that stated, “It's as if you have been put in a garage where, if they don't have room for something but aren't sure if they should throw it out, they put it there where they don't need to think of it again” (p. 1). Many leaders and educators have sensitivity training, and do not think of themselves as racist, classist, or discriminatory towards students. How can leaders maintain this illusion when students feel disregarded and worthless? My colleague and friend Ms. Porter stated I go into “beast mode” when my students misbehave. I am a tuff teacher with high expectations for work, behavior, and respect. Although I go into “beast mode”, it is important that my entire class feel valued and respected while I correct them. Kozol (2005) revealed many educators believe the “only realistic goal should be the nurturing of strong, empowered, and

well-funded schools in segregated neighborhoods” (p. 1). From my observations, attitudes and environment mean more to student achievement in any environment.

#### References

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