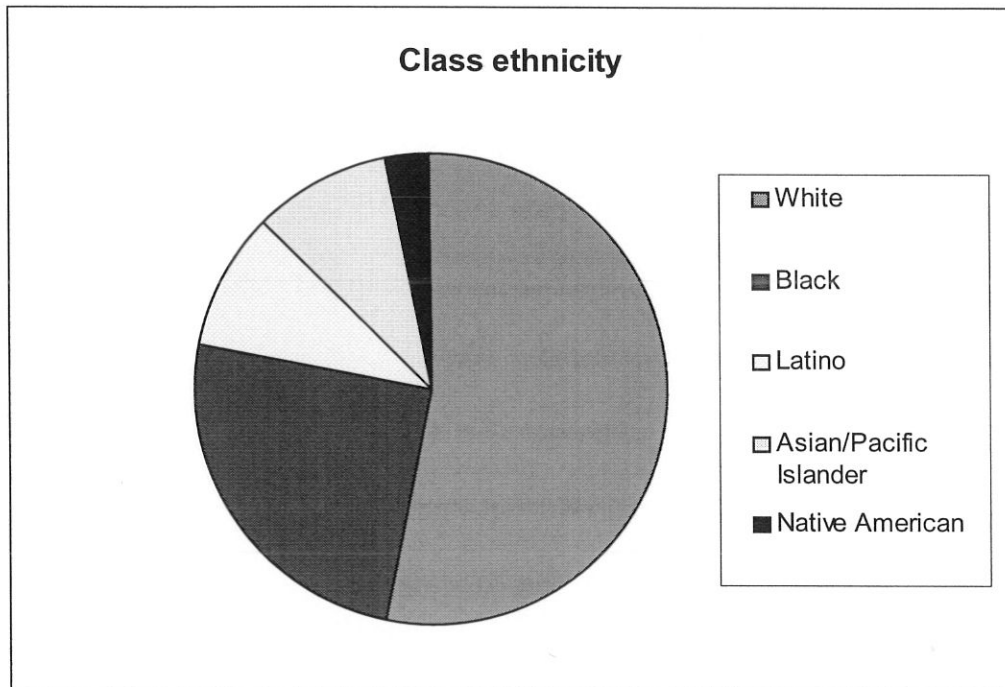


Demographics of class: Language arts/social studies core, grade 7

The classroom in which I am currently working is a seventh grade Core language arts and social studies at Beaumont Middle School. This class consists of 32 students, who spend second period all together in social studies every day, and alternate their time together for other periods, according to the school's "A/B" schedule.

On "A" days, one half of the class (the white group) has writing third period, while the other half has P.E. The same group of students has reading fifth period, and the other half of the class (the blue group) has reading seventh period. Everyone is back together for language arts eighth period. On "B" days, all 32 students have language arts third period, the white group and the blue group meet for reading fifth and seventh periods, respectively, and the blue group meets for writing eighth period.

Of the total 32 students, 15 are female and 17 are male. Eight identify as black, two as Hispanic, two as Native American, three as Asian and 17 as white. One student identifies as Native American and Hispanic. For the most part, these demographics reflect the greater school profile.



One Hispanic student participates in an ESL (English as a Second Language) program outside of the regular classroom. Four students are on IEPs, for reasons listed as speech, emotional issues, math disabilities and ADHD (other health impaired). Seven students are identified as TAG. One student is both TAG identified and has a speech IEP.

Judging from purely aesthetic factors such as the students' dress and appearance, the students appear to vary widely in their socioeconomic status, which ranges from working class (which qualifies the student for free and reduced lunch) to upper middle class. Parental support varies widely, as indicated by teacher phone calls and parent/teacher conferences. While some students live in households that promote reading and the prioritization of academic success, others hail from families who subvert their children's achievement through the need for assistance in family care and responsibilities, a low regard for education in general, or an explicitly negative attitude towards reading and homework.

At first glance, it seems amazing that 32 students can fit into my CT's classroom. It is on the upper level of the school, with a set of windows overlooking the track and blacktop. The students sit at two-person tables arranged in rows, with room to walk in between them, except for the back row which extends along the back wall of the classroom. The back wall also houses an impressive collection of books, including sets of dictionaries, thesauri, and atlases. My CT also acquires large sets of books from Multnomah County Public Library and displays selected volumes according to the current unit of study. For instance, a set of books on medieval life, both fiction and non-fiction, now resides on the back shelves, along with a Shakespeare anthology and copies of *Don Quixote* to make way for the Renaissance unit.

Despite the cramped space, the classroom is a pleasant and supportive environment. Student work and colorful informative posters and organizers adorn every wall. My CT's ultra-organized approach is very evident in the arrangement of supplies, schedules, and the agenda written daily on the white board. A sense of community is further strengthened by a student job chart on the back wall and a "Student of the Week" chart on the side wall. In the job chart, students' photos are weekly rotated to new roles, which range from "gardener" (responsible for watering the classroom's plants), "Snoopy stamper" (rewarding students with stamps for quality work), and "announcer" (reading the day's announcements). Every Friday, students look forward to redeeming the stamps they have collected and putting them in a drawing for two "students of the week." Additionally, students nominate a third "student of the week" by submitting slips that describe something positive that a student has done that week (ex.: "Raven has been

working really hard on her Renaissance project”). All three “students of the week” receive a pencil and a candy bar of some sort.

Because there is so little available space to move around when all 32 students are in the classroom and the white board is used to display the day’s and week’s agendas and other information, my CT frequently uses an overhead projector for lecture, worksheets and other activities. The only computer in the classroom is confined to my CT’s use. Small group work within the large group format is possible, but only through careful planning and execution. Naturally, there is greater flexibility when the small group classes are in session and students can move more freely between desks and interact with the teacher.

Accommodations and differentiation

For the ESL student, many of the unit’s activities include vocabulary and reading scaffolding. For example, several readings utilize strategies such as bold key terms, fact boxes and headings to increase the accessibility of the material.

The student with the speech-related IEP visits only periodically with a communications specialist, as his difficulties are not severe. He is in fact one of the most communicative students of the classroom, and enjoys speaking in front of others and being in the spotlight. Several activities of the unit offer opportunities for him to practice his speaking skills in groups and in front of the class, in particular the group conflict background activity.

The ADHD student sits at the front of the class, in a place where he can communicate freely with the teacher without getting lost and easily distracted in the more cramped space in the back of the room. He requires variety to maintain his motivation and engagement, in addition to predictable routines to foster focus.

In order to address his learning needs, the unit incorporates a range of individual and group activities. At times this student works best with a partner at his desk, which he will be able to do during the unit's initial activities incorporating Sudan background information and the rubric introduction. The group conflict background activity allows for this student to be active within a group while maintaining focus to achieve the specific tasks assigned to his role as a group member. During the writing process, this student will be working with half of the class in small group sessions, which will allow for regular teacher check-ins and individual assistance as needed.

Fifteen students in the class meet reading benchmarks based on 2006-07 TESA scores, while the same number exceeds benchmarks. Two students do not meet benchmarks (see student information table). This unit employs a variety of methods to reach students of all reading levels.

First, the unit utilizes students' reading skills in the initial study of Sudan and the Darfur conflict to inform their essay writing. The group conflict background activity provides one reading scaffold for students with lower-level skills, as it allows students to acquire information from a range of articles while only being required to read one with their group. The students work closely with one source, summarizing and extracting facts from the reading to present to the rest of the class. They also are assigned two to four vocabulary words to research and teach to the class. Once all of the presentations have

been completed, students will have a packet of information and vocabulary from six different articles for later use in their writing. The vocabulary words will also form a word wall which students can refer to during the writing process.

Students will also complete the pre-writing stages and the graphic organizer in class, in order to both receive and provide support for themselves and others. The combination of individual and group work allows for higher-level students to work more independently, while lower-level students will have opportunities to incorporate additional information and add ideas during class discussion and debriefing.

Students will also have a range of sources to use in their essay writing. While some students may choose to only refer to the information presented in class from the group activity articles, higher-level students will be challenged to research additional sources and integrate information from the article library.

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