Reflection Essay

By Michael Amay

There is a lot of talent in the public education system which we most often might underestimate. As a computer science TA at Air Force Academy in Chicago, Illinois, I have come to realize that underprivilege students can be equally capable as more privilege students who can afford perhaps fancier private schools or more established learning institutions. The biggest effect to students underperforming in the academic world is sometimes things not directly coordinate with the question if their smart or not but because of the lack of discipline, proper focus, and dedication towards the material.

As with any school public or private there is always some level of distraction that students can absorb in their classrooms. Whether it's talking about something that they watched, attention driven to their devices, or someone in particular that might be clowning around and bringing attention to themselves. These school always seem to struggle to get their students following directions. All of which became a norm to me while I was present as a TA. Nevertheless, I never hesitated in the capabilities of my students as I too was once a CPS student during my life and came up just fine.

In a typical day students enter the classroom as the teacher begins to get a grip of their attention by welcoming them and asking about their day. In transition from a very loud traffic hallway. It's like some sort of psychological effect happens when one student see's another fellow student begins to prepare for class as each one starts taking out writing utensils and notebooks from their backpacks. As for the loudest students which usually don't pronounce themselves until 5 minutes after class start time. Their body language is changed slowly by an unexpected environment full of silence, calmness, and everyone listening to the teacher exercising her authority stating out loud the learning objectives of the day.

With the diversity public schools contains, I feel all students have a natural curiosity and eagerness to learn. Not to mention the challenging nature of their character to tackle any provocative problem proposed. That's the case with my particular experience. At first learning a block-based programming language such scratch can be intimidating but the curiosity that comes with learning and its immediate visualization results on the screen gives an excitement to anyone willing to learn coding. Soon after everyone in the classroom is making anything from simple fun programs that required intermediate topics such as loops, if statements, and Booleans to more advanced large applications involving multiple concepts and features. The energy and excitement that bounces from one student to another is definitely contagious to everyone in the room including myself – a veteran writing applications small or large. Nevertheless, most students are particularly shy about asking for help when their stuck or aren't familiar with a particular topic, which led me to always try to give a very welcoming energy and showing that I am there for them whenever their needs presents. Thus, I always try to throw in a bit of extra energy and excitement so students can gain the confident to ask another question again and again. Which I think is a very good method on learning anything.

Furthermore, I always try to make the best of experiences from opportunities like these. It's not always that I get to be a TA and explore my inner teaching spirit. It's also a chance to view If I genuinely enjoy and perhaps a good fit for later in my career. I like the fact of developing meaningful relationship with each and everyone of my students and set goals for myself along the way. For example, the first few weeks I set a goal to have at least one or more student know me by name. By the second and third week, I hoped to see students raising their hands confidently and asking for help. Lastly, I thrive my best in every moment to suit up all of my cs skills which I learned in college and incorporate a little bit of knowledge in my response as appropriate. That can be something simple from saying "If you find yourself repeating that line multiple times, try using a for loop so there is less redundancy" to "avoid the use of inner loops as much as possible as that can make your program slower." All in a manner that could be understood and made sense at their level.

In conclusion, coming in as a first time TA, it reminded me of when I was once a student in a underprivilege Chicago public school. We didn't have new textbooks or fancy amenities, but we had all the fundamentals to make a schoolwork. We had a decent size playground and most importantly caring hard-working teachers and faculty members who dedicated their lives into helping us succeed. Above all, the inspiration from teachers to learn and encourage their students to become someone great was something I witness at Air Force academy too. Learning this led to me believe the fact that any willingness to learn is always present in students no matter the situation they may be in nor the environment they occupy. It just takes a couple good heart people in their lives to bring that out of them and guide them towards a path of success.