

Rachel Healy  
6th Grade Class Profile  
Fall 2020

### **General Information about the class**

I chose to profile a 6<sup>th</sup> grade general education class at a middle school in South Portland. Most of the students in the class are 11 years old. There are 10 students in the class, three boys and seven girls. Because of the pandemic, the students stay in this “pod” throughout the day as well as during remote learning. They even stay in the same room together, while the Humanities and Math/Science teachers travel to them. Students are in school two days a week and do remote learning (including brief live Google Meets) three days a week. I am with this pod for Advisory and Humanities, and I supervise their lunch period.

Four of the students in this class have IEPs. Two of the students have physical disabilities: one has hearing loss and wears hearing aids, and we wear masks with clear coverings over the mouth so she can see our lips. The other is blind in one eye and has a special seating placement in the classroom.

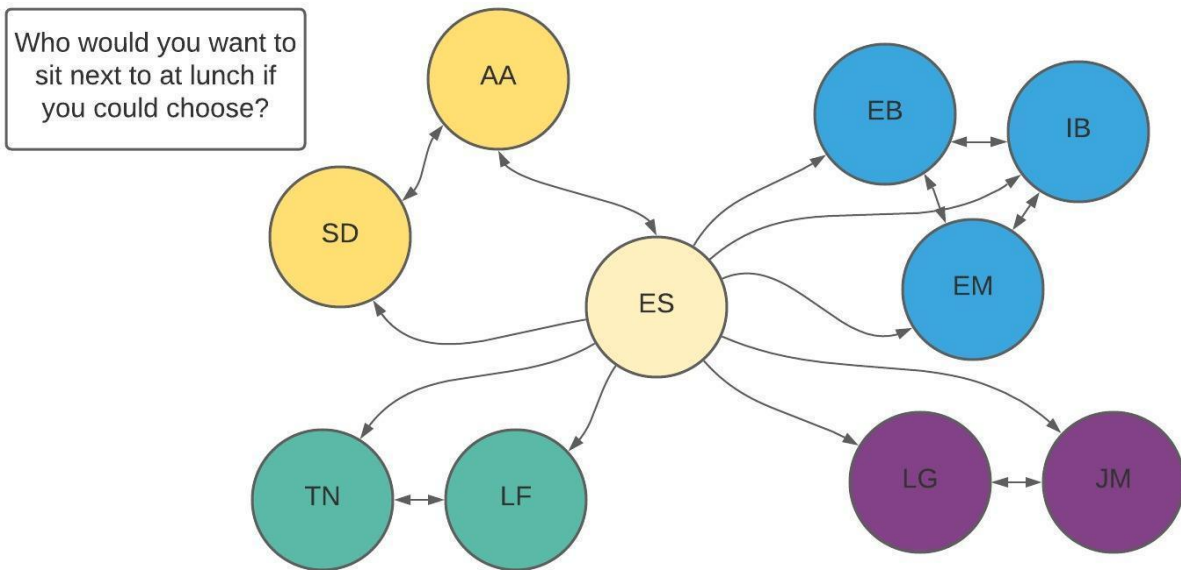
Three of the students in the class, including two of the boys, identify as Black or African American. One is bilingual English/French. None of the students require EL supports.

### **Description of data collection methods**

My goal in this process was to get to know the students in my class as individuals, and to start to build strong and trusting relationships with them. I collected data using a combination of personal “about me” letters that the students submitted before the school year started, a survey I administered during an advisory period, a “Circles of my Multicultural Self” project that was assigned in a Humanities class, as well as anecdotal observations and one-on-one conversations.

Ultimately, I relied most heavily on the observations and individual discussions, for multiple reasons: (1) not all students turned in “about me” letters, even when prompted; (2) In both the letters and the surveys, students did not share a lot of information; (3) In the “Circles of my Multicultural Self” assignment, students focused mostly on hobbies and siblings, which largely repeated information I already knew; and (4) I spend a lot of time with this class throughout the day, including during down-time like movement breaks and lunch. During this time I am able to observe them as a group as well as individuals. I have also been able to have one-on-one conversations with most of them.

## Sociogram information



Almost all of the students in the class named one or two other people they would want to sit next to at lunch, and in most cases it was reciprocal. One student said they would want to sit next to all of the others. Anecdotally, and confirmed by the sociogram questions, I have noticed that the class has unofficially divided itself into a few small groups:

The three boys in the class talk to each other as a unit, mostly about sports, and play football together during movement breaks. Two of the boys know each other from their community football league. Those two boys, in particular, seem to thrive on attention and especially attention from each other – when one of them says something loud and disruptive and gets attention in the form of laughter from the class, the other usually follows by saying something even louder and more disruptive. The third boy occasionally joins in but tends to be quieter.

Three of the girls who identified each other in the sociogram questions tend to talk quietly with each other during down times and movement breaks. They all share common interests including reading, baking, and animals.

Two of the girls are related (they identify as step-cousins) and identified each other in the sociogram questions. However, they don't seem particularly close and only interact socially during some of the movement breaks.

Two of the same girls live in the same neighborhood and tend to chat with each other about their families and try to sneak food back and forth during lunch.

## **Whole class data analysis and interpretation**

See attached spreadsheet for survey questions and anecdotal notes.

*(Note: This is an unprecedented school year. We are in the middle of a global pandemic. Schools physically closed in March of the last school year and scrambled to put together a distance learning program. Students began this school year not having been inside a school in six months. Now, in keeping with health guidelines, they go to school in person only twice a week and participate in distance learning on the other days.*

*While in school, students ONLY interact with the other students in their “pod” – in this case, a core group of 10. They have all subjects together, eat lunch together in the classroom, and have movement breaks together. Any related arts classes or activities where they might see other students happen remotely. There is little to no opportunity to make new friends at school, outside of the pod. This is compounded by the fact that these 6<sup>th</sup> graders are just starting at a new school; prior to this, they went to five different elementary schools spread out around the city. So, there is a good chance that during a school day they might not interact with a single person they knew before September.*

*I have learned that all of these students were eager to come back to school. But, now that they are back, they also feel sad that they are missing out on a “typical” middle school experience. Almost all of the students have shared that they feel like they are missing out because they don’t get to move to different rooms or see different students at lunch or in the halls.)*

Above all, getting to know these students as individuals has helped me to better understand their remote learning situations and home supports. This year, the ability to manage remote learning seems to be the biggest predictor of student success. At this point in the school year, the struggle to get students to show up for Google Meets and to turn in work has eclipsed learning targets and standards.

From talking with students, I have determined there is a fundamental misunderstanding that remote work is actual, real schoolwork that needs to be completed. There is also some remaining confusion over how to use the technology, despite repeated instruction. Even though we always ask students “Do you understand what you need to do?” and “Are there any questions about the assignment?” there are always, inevitably, several follow-up emails along the lines of “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.” And generally, only about half the students are turning in their work regularly.

To that end, I can see that it is important to do two things: (1) offer choice about *how* work is turned in – for example, they can either complete and submit work electronically, or I can give them a printed page to fill out; and (2) have students begin each assignment before the end of class and show me that they know how to do it.

Another thing I have learned about these students is that, with only a few exceptions, they like to read for fun, and they prefer to work alone or in small groups. With that in mind, I would like to incorporate more quiet reading coupled with reading reflections into the daily lesson plan. This would serve the added purpose of providing stress relief in an otherwise stressful time.

While opportunities for small group work are limited this year, I do think we can be creative about incorporating “turn and talk” and “think pair share” activities to give students more opportunities to work in small groups and get to know each other better. And, because students have shown that they are excited to use their iPads, I would like to give them more opportunities to actively participate that are technology-based, such as posting to Padlet or another bulletin-board type app.

## **Reflection**

In reflecting on what I’ve learned about my students, I’ve uncovered a particular bias of mine that colors my expectations and the way I interact with students. I would describe this bias as unconsciously linking students academically based on their social relationships.

For example: In this class, there are only three boys, and they all happen to be loud and, at times, disruptive. They all like to talk to each other, mostly about sports, and to make jokes for each other’s benefit. As a result, I think of them as a unit.

However, when it comes to schoolwork, they are very different. One of them struggles to understand concepts or complete work. One of them demonstrates in class that he understands concepts but only turns in his work some of the time. And one of them is a high performer who understands concepts and does well on his work. Yet, because I tend to think of them as a unit (and a somewhat disruptive one) I also tend to lump them together as learners. One way I would like to address this is to try more small group work, where each of them is paired with someone else from the class. Partner work could help them to explore their identities as learners separate from each other and help me see them in that way as well.

Additionally, in order to minimize unwanted behavior, we decided in the third week of school to move their desks. Two of the boys who used to sit near the front of the room (and each other) now sit at opposite ends of the fourth row, where they are no longer in full view of the class or each other. This reduced the triggers and rewards that were accompanying their disruptive behavior and seems to be helping them both stay “on task.”

As another example, I am beginning to see that one of the girls in the well-behaved group of three is not performing as well on her work as the others and sometimes doesn’t turn it in. However, because I have always thought of her as part of the “high

functioning unit of three,” I risk allowing her to slip through the cracks and not get the support she might need.

In reflecting on both of these examples, I can tell that I need to work on seeing students as individuals when it comes to learning style and abilities, not just other characteristics.

I have also been thinking a lot about race and what it means in the context of these students. Two anecdotal observations have made me think more about my approach to equity in the classroom. Two of the boys in this class identify as Black. They both live with their mothers, who are white. But I had two very different observations about them regarding their race:

- (1) In a conversation about possible career choices, E.S. , who is Black, told me he had been thinking about becoming a police officer but was rethinking it because of recent incidents of police violence against Black people. This student also talked about race in our “Circles of my multicultural self” discussion.
- (2) In a conversation about books we are reading, a student who is white mentioned a book that deals with current issues of racism. S.D., who is Black, said “I wouldn’t want to read that. Why would I want to think about racism?” This student did not mention race in our “Circles of my multicultural self” discussion.

These two very different exchanges indicate to me that these two students are at different places in their personal considerations of race. It was a reminder to me that as I design Humanities lessons, I shouldn’t expect students who happen to be people of color to be eager to talk about race. With that in mind, I will be sure to incorporate race and equity issues in a way that does not make anyone feel singled out.