

Kendra Vair's Class—Journal Log

1/25/18

What Went Well

- Kendra uses the one rule: “Feel free to do anything as long as it doesn’t cause a problem for anyone or anything. That includes you, me, friends, peers, teachers, and guest speakers.” She likes to do this because she feels it’s better for classroom management (not being such a constant rule enforcer) and it teaches students how to be accountable for their actions. I appreciated learning this rule in the beginning because it taught me to treat behavior objectively rather than trying to be a students’ friend.
- Generally speaking, Kendra is a peppy person that’s pretty good about calling out behavior right when it happens. She is able to call it out and seamlessly go back to work.
- The girls, for the most part, are focused and attentive. This is especially true of the eighth grade girls, in my opinion. The sixth grade girls can be a little squirrely and confrontational, but they are generally pretty engaged.
- Overall, I’d say that it’s pretty easy for me to talk to about three-quarters of the students. Compared to the high school students I worked with (and maybe the students at Boltz), it’s taken a little bit longer for me to build rapport and trust with them (I think it would help if I had an attendance sheet so I knew everyone’s names). Discipline and managing behavior has been pretty hard when the students didn’t really know who I was.
- Kendra mainly uses love and logic in her classroom. I think that it’s too early in my practicum work with her to tell if it’s effective yet, but I’m glad that I’m getting exposure to love and logic in action.
- Though students start out squirrely and inattentive, they are able to mellow out and focus as time goes on. I’d say about three quarters of the students are able to give respectful attention to the teacher even if they are bored. This seems to be easier with the girls than the boys, and I think this is because they are more hyperactive.
- There was a student that really could not sit still and constantly stated how bored he was with Kendra teaching about nutrition. He seemed particularly miffed about this when Kendra discussed the unhealthy ingredients of Cheetos, Starbucks Frappes, and energy drinks. Kendra asked me to go out in the hallway with the student and quiz him on the Kahoot questions they were working on. I took that time to get to know the student and ask him what his interests were regarding junk food. He said that he likes processed sugary treats (brownies, apple pie, and energy drinks) because it gives him energy for his ADHD because he was so hyper all of the time. He also crashed really hard when he came home from school, and he said his parents let him drink coffee to calm him down. While I disagree with the nature of his food choices and encouraged the student to consider eating meat or fruit to get energy, I was impressed by his ability to rationalize and support with evidence why he chose to make the food decisions that he did. I also felt that the conversation was good because I didn’t dehumanize him for the

choices he made (even though I knew they weren't healthy). For him, being told that the foods he loved were bad and unhealthy were probably heart-breaking, and he didn't want to give up something that he loved. So he was willing to justify it in order to validate that the foods weren't really all that bad. I'm glad I had this conversation with him. It made me realize that sixth graders are very capable of critical thinking.

- Philosophical chairs.
- There were a couple of instances with sixth grade where the students were upset about group dynamics. Either students being left out or other kids in the group weren't on task. Kendra said that she's okay with conflict and discord in groups because it teaches them to work it out. They are also able to reflect on it afterwards and try again. I thought that was a really interesting piece of advice, and I would like to consider that when I'm making art assignments.

What Didn't Go Well

- Some of the students, especially the boys, are very vocal about not liking something or not being engaged. This can sometimes come off in a very disrespectful or inappropriate way to the speaker. While I can give them credit for speaking their mind, I think that giving feedback in a mindful and respectful way can be done a little bit better. Devin, in particular, said, "Yeah, I don't care about any of this."
- This happened a lot because there was a substitute teacher and three speakers talking about substance abuse.
- The substitute set the tone by saying, "If you are sitting next to someone that's distracting or chatting, I suggest you move." The students glared at her with smiles and didn't move, which indicated to me that they weren't going to take what she said seriously. The substitute also said, "If you continue to keep talking and being a distraction, then I suggest you walk up to the deans office." Giving students their own incentive to make their own decisions in this regard wasn't super effective. No middle school student is going to willingly walk themselves to the dean's office. Considering the love and logic talk that I had earlier that day, I felt that the expectation could've been handled differently. When it comes off so authoritative and parent-like, it can be a huge turn-off to middle school students.
- The speakers lectured on substance abuse for fifty minutes, using powerpoint slides that were loaded with tiny print and statistics that talked about the long-term consequences relevant to adults (such as cancer and health issues). Whereas Kendra was really good about calling behavior out on the spot, the speakers had to frequently pause and gave dissatisfied pouty looks. This turned into a long discussion and negotiation about trying to get students on task. This only egged the students on, in my opinion.
- There was a lot of arguments and debate about "the one rule." It seems like Kendra did a better job enforcing the rule than the substitute and I did. There was a lot of "What did I do wrong?" and "It's not my fault. She's doing it too." At this age, there's a lot of

attempts at persuasion, saying, “It said we can do ‘anything,’ which means that I can sit back here and be on my phone.” There isn’t a lot of rational reasoning with this group.

- I had to break up two major altercations during class. I will go into more detail on that at the bottom. But this really tested my conflict management skills. I used the love and logic approach, which I don’t think worked very well with boys. Connor agreed with me. He said that I should use a lot more direct language and sarcasm for middle school boys. I’m not sure how I feel about that, but I’m open-minded to his view. Connor also felt that most classroom management strategies are a lot more women-focused, which is not how boys and men operate. I’m keeping that in consideration too.
- The students seemed to not be attentive when the substitute talked about the health issues of viral challenges. I was surprised to discover that the students were actually defensive about the challenges being cool, saying that it wasn’t that big of a deal and it wasn’t bad for them. One of the students said that the tide pod challenge was cool, which involved swallowing a tide pod as a dare. I was surprised by how excited and defensive they were by it. I guess what I would do in reaction to that is have them guess which challenge is the most and least deadly, based on the statistics read on the board.

How Did I Feel?

- Generally speaking, I’m fairly open-minded about working in a middle school environment. I feel a lot more comfortable working with teenagers in a middle school than at an elementary school. I also get a lot of feedback that the students are bad or misbehave a lot. While there is a lot of unruly behavior, I don’t really see bad kids. I just see kids being kids. I consider bad kids to be picking fights, really aggressive behavior, and constant confrontations. Even kids that are confrontational, I think, are doing it for entertainment and humor rather than actual rage and deeper issues.
- Sometimes, I feel uncomfortable working with younger kids (sometimes the eighth graders are the exception). I’m starting to learn that there is no logic with younger kids, which I’m very uncomfortable with because I’m a very rational person. Middle school students are very emotional. Sometimes, I feel frustrated when I get into a debate with them. I get really impatient with the “What did I do wrong?” and the constant persuasion that they are the innocent one, even when their inappropriate behavior is very explicit. Even when I try to negotiate, be empathetic, and keep calm, they will continue to escalate and pick a fight. I’m not really sure how to handle it, but I’m sure that I will keep learning.
- My biggest discomfort with handling behavioral issues is based on not upsetting the mentor teacher. When the substitute was there, my job was to support her and the guest speaker to manage behavior. While this gave me a chance to practice settling conflict, I felt like I had to operate in a way that I wouldn’t have handled it if I were the one in charge. It didn’t necessarily make me bitter. It’s just that it’s hard to tell someone to sit still and be focused when the lecture is already pretty boring for them. The good news is that I can still learn a lot from that as well.

- I'm really proud of myself for keeping calm and controlling my emotions during all of this. Though I'm still learning how to give natural consequences for behavior, I still think that one of my biggest strengths is not letting their behavior get to me personally. Sure, it bothers me. But I'm impressed that I'm able to control myself and walk into the classroom while being in the present moment (not letting the conflict linger with me). This comes from my mindfulness training from yoga and meditation. I can't wait to meditate more and use that to my advantage.

What did I learn? / What I would do differently

- I think one of the major reasons that there were so many behavioral issues with the substance abuse powerpoint and the health and wellness powerpoint was that there was a lot of text being read verbatim and a lot of information that pertained more to adults rather than to students. Considering that students spent most of the day listening to lectures and following teachers' rules, they were probably just mentally burned out and wanted to socialize with their peers to get some sort of entertainment and stimulation out of the experience. If I had to do it over, I probably would've suggested a lot more hands-on activities or quiz the students on the knowledge they already had about these topics (they said that they already knew a lot about these things, and they were bored because they had a ton of lectures on them). I'd probably do a kahoot quiz rather than jeopardy because it's something that students are used to and would be more engaged with than holding up a whiteboard and answering questions. Group work also caused a lot of squabbling and rough-housing, which could've been tempered with a little bit with Kahoot. I'd also incorporate a lot of sarcasm and statistics related to teen issues that the students would've laughed at. For example, talking about acne and dating related to those things. I would also incorporate a lot of personal stories and sentiments with it.
- The main thing that I learned from this experience is knowing my target audience and how they relate to the situation. Talk to them about the topic on their level rather than from an adult perspective. Students in middle school are probably really sick of getting lectured by adults. Put them in power in some way.
- I would also try to consider things from a cultural standpoint. If students come from a family that smokes or has an unhealthy lifestyle, and they tell the students that there's nothing wrong with these foods (or at least models it, or lets them buy it at the store), then it defeats anything that the teacher says in the classroom. Unless the student has a pretty strong moral compass about bettering his/her health, they're probably going to keep doing what they're doing. I agree with this, somewhat. I never really liked being graded on health and fitness because I liked doing what worked best for me, rather than having someone tell me what to do and be graded for it.
- I would also say that I wouldn't stereotype the students as being deviants or being disrespectful. They're mainly testing their power as their own authority figures (not all, but some). They're also concerned about having fun and socializing with their friends. But they only have so much mental stamina to get through the day, and they are tired. I'm sure that socializing with peers restores their stamina a bit.

- I would recommend doing a philosophical chairs activity to debate healthiness of food, and give the students a chance to persuade why something is good or bad. This puts them into more power as the experts rather than having an adult tell them what to do. I think that's really necessary. Rather than having them be lectured constantly, they want to feel like they are the smart intelligent ones that have an opinion on the matter—that matters.