Part IV: Day in the Life Project Reflection

Leshaun T. Jenkins

ELP 651 North Carolina State University

The Day in The Life Project that we were assigned was compelling. In my 19 years of education, I had not had the experience of shadowing a child to see education through their lens. Of course there were some things that were expected, but there were also things that were revealed through this experience that I never would have thought about. Valuable knowledge and feedback from students was obtained during the course of this project. As I prepare to unpack some of these revelations, I think that it is pertinent to identify areas that don’t often show up on the radar of the student experience while they are at school.

 One thing that was very revealing to me was simply the experience of navigating in the hallways from class to class. It’s very challenging for students to get from class to class and to their lockers. Once a student arrives at their locker, they often times have to wait until there is room to occupy to get into their locker. The level of comfort depending upon the student, grade level of the student, and gender of the student all play vital roles in the experience of the students.

 Some of my starting questions really drove this project home for me. It gave me an opportunity to look through a specific lens to see specifically the instructional deficiencies that often create achievement gaps for young men of color. One of those questions was centered around this notion of making real life connections. In the Intro to Math class that I observed, one of the students told me: “I like Math, I like my teacher, but I don’t understand why we have to learn this”. This really opened my eyes to a concept. As educators, we often deliver the what, but we sometimes neglect to deliver the why. We fail to answer the questions of: Why am I teaching this? Why do you need to know this? We often fail to connect the real life relevance of what we are teaching, and this was evident in a few of observations that I conducted. Along these same lines, cultural relevance was also missing. It made we wonder about the level of voice, choice, and student agency that truly existed in the classroom. One of the young men actually told me that he was bored with what he was reading in English class. He said he wanted to read something that he could relate to. Even though this is something that came to no surprise, but it became more clear than ever before that students need to engage in learning that looks and feel like them. They should engage in learning that has cultural relevance and culturally assimilates elements of a diverse culture.

 Another one of my starter questions pertained to the idea of the inception of collaborative learning or group learning. At the beginning of this process, one of my students that I was shadowing said, “I like this class, and my teacher, I just wish we could work in groups more”. Not only did this come from a student, but it was echoed by several students. The students were screaming for human interaction. As I was observing a group of these students in their Intro to English II class, class was characterized at that moment as dull and very little response from the students. Once the teacher asked them to turn and talk to their neighbor about what she was teaching, the class just woke up with energy and excitement. It’s like they were starving for human interaction. This was compelling to me as I began to think about ways that students can be engaged more and organized onto self- managed learning teams.

 This project has opened my eyes to a view of student learning that is inspiring. I am inspired to bring these finding to light to improve teaching that will have a direct impact on student learning, particularly boys of color. I am also excited to follow that up by focusing on quality coaching to see what impact that will have on student data and student outcomes socially, academically, and behaviorally.