

## Community Mapping Project Reflection

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Dr. Valena Spencer

DSPETL Teaching Fellow

When I first realized that I would be teaching at a Title 1 School in the city Conyers and Rockdale County, many thoughts ran through my mind. I expected that due to the school's location it would be deep in the woods. Title I, Part A funds are earmarked to improve educational programs students and ensure economically, and socially disadvantaged students receive equal opportunity for access to a quality education. Effective means of improving student achievement must include efforts to improve and reinforce teaching and increasing parent/community engagement (gadoe.org). Therefore, I envisioned the school as being in an impoverished community, in the country with children that came from broken homes and possibly with single parents. When I found in my research statistics that many of the students were grade levels behind in their reading, I felt that they would be difficult to teach. I also expected them to be shy, insecure, and perhaps even unruly. Since I also grew up south of the metro Atlanta area, I was familiar with how Conyers was years ago and how it has changed. There has been much development and growth, from rural and Caucasian to developed and African American with a mix of other ethnic groups. I now see that things are not exactly what I expected in the education arena when a school has a designation of Title 1.

Consequently, the school is in a nice area and many of the students come from nice families. The children are more motivated and talkative than I first thought, especially after

engaged by culturally responsive pedagogy. Many seem eager to learn well, are very inquisitive, and have very little problem following instructions. I was intrigued to find out that six schools in Newton County were named Title 1 Reward Schools by Georgia Department of Education a couple of years ago. Also, in Rockdale County, two schools, Barksdale Elementary and Lorraine Elementary were named Highest Performing Rewards Schools. I see there is a shift happening.

Moreover, I am pleased that Title 1 schools give each child the opportunity to receive a high-quality education and beneficial academic achievement standards. I like that the parents are encouraged to give their input in Conyers as it pertains to how the involvement funds are budgeted. I did not expect for parents to be so involved in this aspect of their children's education at a Title 1 school. The subject area schools, Memorial Middle and Salem High, have family engagement teams which I was pleasantly surprised to learn. This is needed to better help monitor the student's learning process. It also gives the children more incentive to learn and boosts morale. It is always essential to know that parents want to provide motivation and encouragement for their children.

Some of the students can be a bit shy, but I imagine this is likely due to feelings of low self-worth, language barriers, or learning disabilities. However, some other classes are much more outspoken than I anticipated. The students are instructed to come in virtual learning with their cameras on. For those that are shy, I will work hard to make them feel comfortable and gain confidence in themselves. I did expect to experience some difficulties along the way. This is because a Title 1 School's main purpose is to help underprivileged children meet difficult state mandated standards. I will continue to encourage the students to do their best to succeed in the classroom.

Moreover, a Title 1 designation is extremely important because schools with a disproportionate number of low-income students are provided state funds. Teachers are given

incentives to teach study skills classes to help those who are behind or who may have difficulty keeping up. A daily Math Study Skills class is assigned to me. This will greatly help to narrow the divide between low-income students and other students as this is similar to tutoring. The lesson plans offer the students more than just mere content. They seek to be engaging and provide rigor. I heard rumors that what we learn in the Master's Program at Georgia State is not accepted at the school level. I was not expecting for the lesson plans to be so detailed and thorough with differentiation to improve student learning. The students are provided with instructional aids as and virtual classroom help. This will assist the students with learning disabilities in meeting the goals set forth by the Georgia Standards. A goal is set with my mentor to communicate and help students understand the Georgia Standards which are stated daily at the beginning of class.

Core academic subjects are particular content areas that the students require the most outside help with. Federal, local, and state work in concert to supply the much-needed resources for the Title 1 schools. I was aware that at least forty percent of the students need to be rendered low-income for a school to be labeled, a Title 1 School. I was surprised to see that so many of the children seem to come from nice homes. As I explored the 30013-zip code area for research, it was discovered that the median price listed for sale is \$239,900. The median sold price is \$212,500, with a \$97 average price per square foot according to Zillow.com. I expected for the area to be somewhat downtrodden and an area that was possibly riddled with crime. The shopping on Hwy 138 is 4 miles away and requires a car to get there, however there are many stores and restaurants to choose from. The nearest grocery store is 2.9 miles away. This qualifies the area as a food desert. I must admit, I would feel comfortable living in the area, because I too am accustomed to driving a few miles for services like these mentioned above.

Furthermore, I thought Memorial Middle School would likely be an older building and that I would feel a bit nervous or uncomfortable at first. It was refreshing to see that the atmosphere and environment was pleasant and looked nothing like I had initially expected. It was obvious that administrators put much time and effort into preparing and maintaining a healthy learning environment. This was the best part of my research and I engaged the most in discovery of this process as it involved personal experiences. I would like to incorporate breathing exercises and mindfulness into the classroom now that the Principal recommends “brain breaks”.

Additionally, I see some diversity within the school as well. I had previously thought correctly that most of the students would be African American and Hispanic. I am confident that my teaching and mentoring will help the students to open-up and develop a stronger sense of determination. Teaching critically relevant pedagogy in the virtual classroom, I will apply the strategies that I have learned in order to make students more confident whether they are working in a group or alone. These strategies will also aid me in helping students deal with language barriers. I will be better able to help them to comprehend what they are reading.

I was most shocked to learn that the reading level of the entire school that I would be teaching in, was at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level for a middle school of 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Hence the strong implementation of English Language Arts daily study skills, which is the perfect next step for remediation. This research project gives me the openness and perspective to embrace the programming set forth by the district to improve these scores. I feel that using formative assessments will help me to monitor each student’s growth and level of improvement. STAR Testing is done three times per year. After analyzing the data, I can use a workshop type classroom environment because this will allow students to read a variety of texts at different rates while responding to the texts in various ways. This way literacy can be added to the science classroom. Students are then

able to better comprehend what they have read and to write responses accordingly. The reading and writing fit together with the content as one to simply enhance the other. This is more helpful than in the traditional classroom because it allows them to comprehend what they have read at a faster rate.

Furthermore, I would use science mini-lessons with the workshop environment since this would bring direct instruction. These lessons provide needed information about the student's daily work. I will also have students to read aloud which is an excellent idea for those with short attention spans or who have difficulty interacting with others. This will allow them to open-up and become more comfortable speaking before a group or in an online meeting format. This is paramount for students who have language barriers. All the time drawing the students into a deeper understanding of science and mathematics and understanding the community where they came from.

Understanding the schools CCRPI score of 73.5 shows a need to improve student literacy and build their vocabulary which will in turn further improve their comprehension skills. This will speed up the learning process and shorten the gap between these students and others who do not have the same learning struggles. I want the students to interact with each other so that they learn about various cultures and traditions. Using culturally responsive perspective to help dispel any misconceptions or stereotypes that students have about those who are different than them. As an educator, I will also use visualization which allows students to view things in their head and see things from a historical perspective and the others perspective.

Consequently, I will use the thinking out loud strategy for my` more challenged students. This will give them insight on how skilled readers are able to easily comprehend the texts. I did not anticipate using the strategies that I have studied so quickly. But this is very much needed in order to better assist and teach my students. The use of these combined strategies will provide

comfort in working with others. They will also serve as catalysts to encourage students to work diligently in order to complete their assignments.

I understand that the children in a Title 1 School may have learning disabilities that cause them difficulty and makes them require more help. But I was surprised to see how some of the students do not allow their disabilities to hinder them. They are motivated and work tediously to get their assignments completed. Students with low self-esteem, will be encouraged even more so, so that they develop faith in themselves. I will be there to guide them and answer any questions that they need addressed outside of school.

This should dispel any doubts that any of my students are feeling. I will inform them all that each person has weaknesses as well as strengths. This is what makes us all unique and individuals. I was glad to see the students seem to really enjoy discussions and most seem anxious to learn and share their thoughts. Though some are still a bit shy, I am confident that in time they will come out of their shells and find confidence in learning in a group setting. The group assignments will serve as a bridge between the students with language barriers and the ones without it.

Moreover, I am also planning on utilizing the predictability strategy, but I find it to be a bad idea for what I intend to do. This is because it is not an effective strategy for understanding others. This would likely encourage premature judging which could potentially give credence to negative stereotypes which are false. I am happy that the school encourages parents to participate and provide their input. The more support that students have the more likely they are to meet the requirements for Georgia Standards of Excellence in their core classes.

Nevertheless, I was not expecting to find that the 30013-zip code in Conyers to be well represented in various achievements in their schools. For example, the Memorial Middle School Ladies Flag Football Team are 1<sup>st</sup> place winners last year. Many other trophies are displayed in the front hall of the school. The administration Team take pride in their school and show great leadership. Title 1 Schools are known for having challenges and these issues are not all the same. Some schools have issues with overcrowding, lack of resources, poverty, and even social/geographical challenges (thebestschools.org). So, it is exciting to find that no matter the struggles or issues, Memorial and Salem do not allow these challenges to hinder them. I think this is a good way to motivate my students by drawing on school pride.

In closing, I have decided to teach and inspire my students to meet their challenges head on and to be relentless in their quests for success. To go above and beyond the expectations of others in order to achieve their goals. These students may be grade levels behind in their learning, especially reading or math, but knowing that most of them are more eager for knowledge than I imagined, will likely make it easier to boost their morale. I had some preconceived notions, some gossip style information and concerns prior to gaining knowledge about the school and its students. Now that I have gotten some insight, I feel that this is going to be an interesting and rewarding endeavor for both myself and my students.

## References

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