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Praxis Design Seminar

2 May 2024

### Theory of Understanding

The town I grew up in had four public elementary schools and a combined public junior high/ high school. Though I did not realize it when I was younger, there was a clear socioeconomic line between each elementary school, with my school being on the lowest end. Growing up, I thought I was middle class, but once I reached junior high, I was placed in the honors program (along with two other students from my elementary school) for all classes except math. All of a sudden I never saw my friends and was placed in classes with strangers who went to different elementary schools than me. While in class I would hear what my new classmates had done over the summer, what school field trips they had attended, and what books they had been reading for classes; I was overwhelmed with imposter syndrome.

Why had my teachers not prepared me for this? What had I done wrong to miss so much?

Come to find out I had done nothing wrong; it was my school that had failed to keep up with the other three elementary schools due to a severe lack of funding. Looking back we had fewer teachers who had to deal with larger class sizes (my classes were never under twenty-five students) while the other schools usually had around fifteen to twenty students per class. I did not realize it at the time, but I was not given much attention in school because my teachers had to focus on so many other students. I could not be their priority because I was doing okay. They rightly chose to focus on the students who were clearly struggling to get help with assignments and social skills.

However, not all the blame can or should be placed on the teachers at my old school. The people who were and still are in charge of the daily operations of all the schools in my district should harbor some, if not all, the blame. They are the ones who decided that more funding should go to the other three elementary schools and not mine because of the socioeconomic status of the families. They are even the ones who decided to close my elementary school at the end of the last academic school year. Their reasoning was that they could no longer support funding four elementary schools, but it was clear what they were not saying: my school's lack of high test scores could not be sustained any longer. My school was not profitable for them anymore because it was obvious that we could not compete with the students at the other elementary schools. We had no test prep sessions after school and even though our teachers tried, they could not make us care about our grades as much as other students because many of my classmates had out-of-school responsibilities that teachers could not ignore. It was unreasonable of them to assign many of my classmates a book to read in a week because they had to take care of younger family members while at home or they knew that no one would be able to help them at home with the assignments.

My teachers tried to make up for this in class, but they could only do so much during the school day. It was unreasonable of the school board to assume they could achieve this goal. However, they did blame the teachers for their student's lack of academic success instead of the lack of funding. It was much easier for them to falsely place the blame instead of trying to fix the problem they had created, they made it even more difficult for the teachers to try and find reasonable solutions.

When they decided to close the school last year, it was an ongoing process, especially when the decision was made public and families were not given all the information. While the school board blamed their lack of a budget to sustain four individual elementary schools, it was clear why my school was the one to be closed and not another one: our teachers were not as prepared to teach

higher-level classes because they had never been expected to before, while the other teachers had been doing it since the beginning and were used to this expectation. The school board could not admit this failure to the families because then they would be admitting that not all the schools had been receiving the same level of funding. Administrators and teachers need to be allowed to be transparent with everyone in order for positive change to be made in schools that are struggling. If this had been the case for my school, it is possible that families would understand why the change was made so they could better help the children in my town to receive better, more in-depth education by teachers who have the time and resources to help guide them through their academic careers.