

Creating a Safe Haven: Community-Building in the Secondary Classroom

By Erica Needles

Introduction

My self-study was inspired by my desire to develop a classroom community where authentic learning can take place. My self-study focuses on my role, as a pre-service teacher and leader in the classroom and school context, in creating an engaging learning environment where students who are disenchanted with the learning process can achieve academically and socially.



Participants

I conducted research in two Junior Literature and Composition Essentials classes. There was a mixed group of twenty-six student participants involved in the study. Eighty percent of students in the sample group have an IEP.

Point of Departure

Does creating a classroom community positively influence student participation and academic performance?

Methodology

- Collect and study existing data made available by other scholars
- Integrate students' opinions and suggestions for the following: instruction, assessment, decision-making, classroom aesthetics
- Integrate supplemental materials that appeal to the interests of individuals and group
- Encourage personal reflection
- Invite student participation and sharing
- Celebrate personal and collective achievement
- Invite verbal and written criticism from students, supervising professor, and cooperating teachers

Feedback

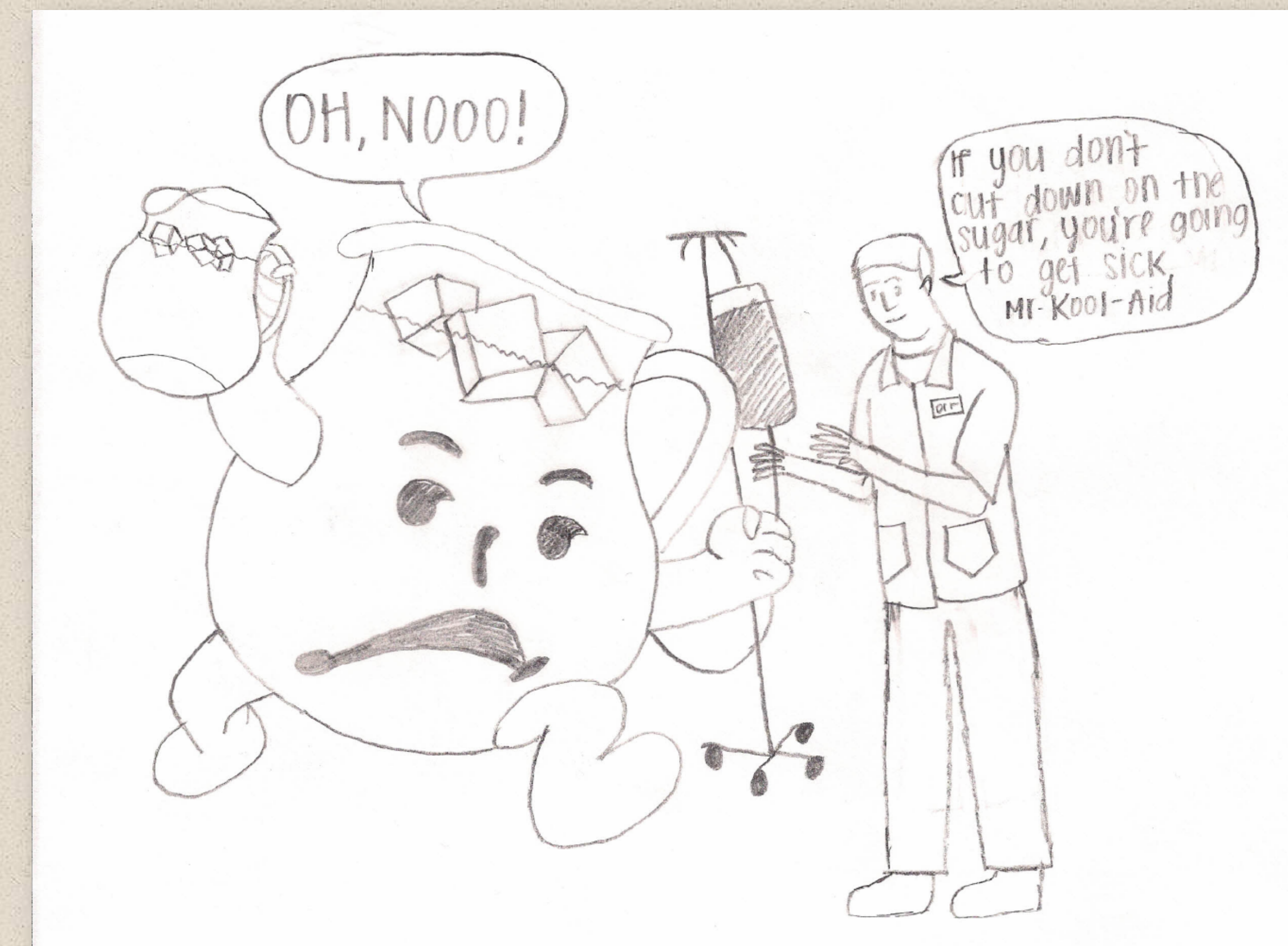
This class responded very willingly and very positively to Erica. Her rapport was strong and positive.

Despite the struggles of keeping these students focused and the constant interruptions, Erica has established a very strong rapport with these students. She enjoys them, and they enjoy and respect her.

This was a very active class with a great deal of participation and interest.

Student Work

Family also means a lot to me. When I am with them, I get to be myself without any judgment. I come from a very large family that is all over the country and some are in other countries. So every couple of years when we all get together and get to see each other, excitement stirs inside me as I eagerly rush to meet unfamiliar faces. I feel safe with my family because they are the people that I feel comfortable around and have known all of my life. So I can let free of my emotions instead of keeping it all hidden inside of a rough exterior.



Preliminary Findings

- Students are willing to share work with teacher and peers
- Students actively participate in group discussions
- Students give serious and insightful feedback and suggestions
- Students keep one another accountable
- Students enjoy seeing their work displayed
- Creating a classroom community can be easily integrated into everyday planning and preparation
- Creating a rapport with students allows teachers to be less dependent on administration for classroom management