

## **Observation Report**

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EDRS 812

Spring 2022

### **Initial Expectations**

My understanding is I will be walking into a typical Virginia high school. As this is a more rural high school, it is smaller than the high schools I grew up around, though still sizable. The high school setting typically has art and murals covering their concrete or cinderblock walls, with lockers dispersed abundantly along some walls and some bays set aside for rows of lockers. The teacher I will be observing has let me know that their classroom is easy to find from the front of the school. Therefore, as typical for a high school, I will enter through the front doors, check in at the front desk, take a short walk through the halls, and likely end up at a classroom with no windows. Additionally, as is typical, since I will be arriving at the very beginning and end of the school day, I will be ushered in through a flood of high schoolers exiting their buses and entering the schools (or vice versa at the end of the day), heading to see their friends or go to their classes. As it is a traditionally more conservative area, I also expect to see more conservative motifs or maybe lax masking as compared to what I am used to in the affluent Northern Virginia area. I expect the environment to be loud and potentially chilly.

I expect to see a handful of school staff other than the teacher I am observing. This might include secretaries or other administrators working in the front office. I feel it is reasonable to assume I'll run into many high school students given that I'll be arriving at the start of and end of the day. I will certainly encounter my friend and his students. Overall, I expect to simply see my teacher friend imparting knowledge about calculus to his students during my first observation. I expect all of them to be sarcastic, and given that they are IB students, will likely pick up on concepts easily. They may even display intrinsic interest in the material and be motivated and engaged in class. I'm not sure if they will interact with me or not; even if they're curious they're curious they may be too tired to talk to me.

For the club after school, I was told I will be meeting them in the school's library. I am imagining I will likely walk in as the students are. I imagine this might be a more boring observation as my friend indicated he is just the adult in the room and the students engage in their separate groups. I imagine, as all my experience with tabletop role playing games, the kids might be loud, sessions will be filled with laughter, and it will be a very smooth couple of hours with low levels of interaction from me and my friend. I highly doubt the students will interact with me; they will likely be too absorbed in their games.

### **Description of the Space**

#### **IB Calculus Classroom**

As you enter PL's classroom, you are presented with a line of sight straight ahead to the teacher desk. It seems to be a rather standard desk, with a particle board surface covered in wood grain-print contact paper, with drab beige sides and shiny metal legs that form a frame. On the desk is a thermos, presumably filled with coffee. Surrounding the thermos is two laptops and a slew of papers, calculators, pens, paperclips, and a singular bottle of hand sanitizer. Behind the desk is a box of papercraft decorations and miscellaneous crafting supplies, a large black oscillating fan, and an outlet embedded into the stark painted-white cinderblock wall. A large cathode-ray tube television sat on a mount, facing the wall. Underneath the television was a tan cabinet covered in stickers, an assortment of chargers, cables, and papercraft decorations, and a singular orange balloon with "Desi is my WIFE" written on one side, and a comical cartoon face on the other. To the right of the desk is a supply table, surrounded by plastic bins filled with folders, textbooks, Dungeons and Dragons sourcebooks, miscellaneous papers, and more sundry items. Extra chairs and one extra desk sit to the right of this table, and in the back corner of the room is a large, closed storage cabinet, covered in the same wood grain contact paper as the teacher desk, with papercraft decorations resting on top.

To your left as you enter the room, there is a smartboard centered on the wall with a green chalkboard mounted behind. On the smartboard is a slide with three integrals lined up next to each other. To either side on the chalkboard are notes about homework and math problems on blue- and peach-colored papers. Taped onto the cinderblock wall and bulletin boards surrounding the boards are student drawings, many of them in the style of Japanese anime, with captions akin to the latest meme trends. On the closest part of this wall to the entry door is a storage shelf filled with miscellaneous classroom supplies. A stepstool leans on it on the side next to the board.

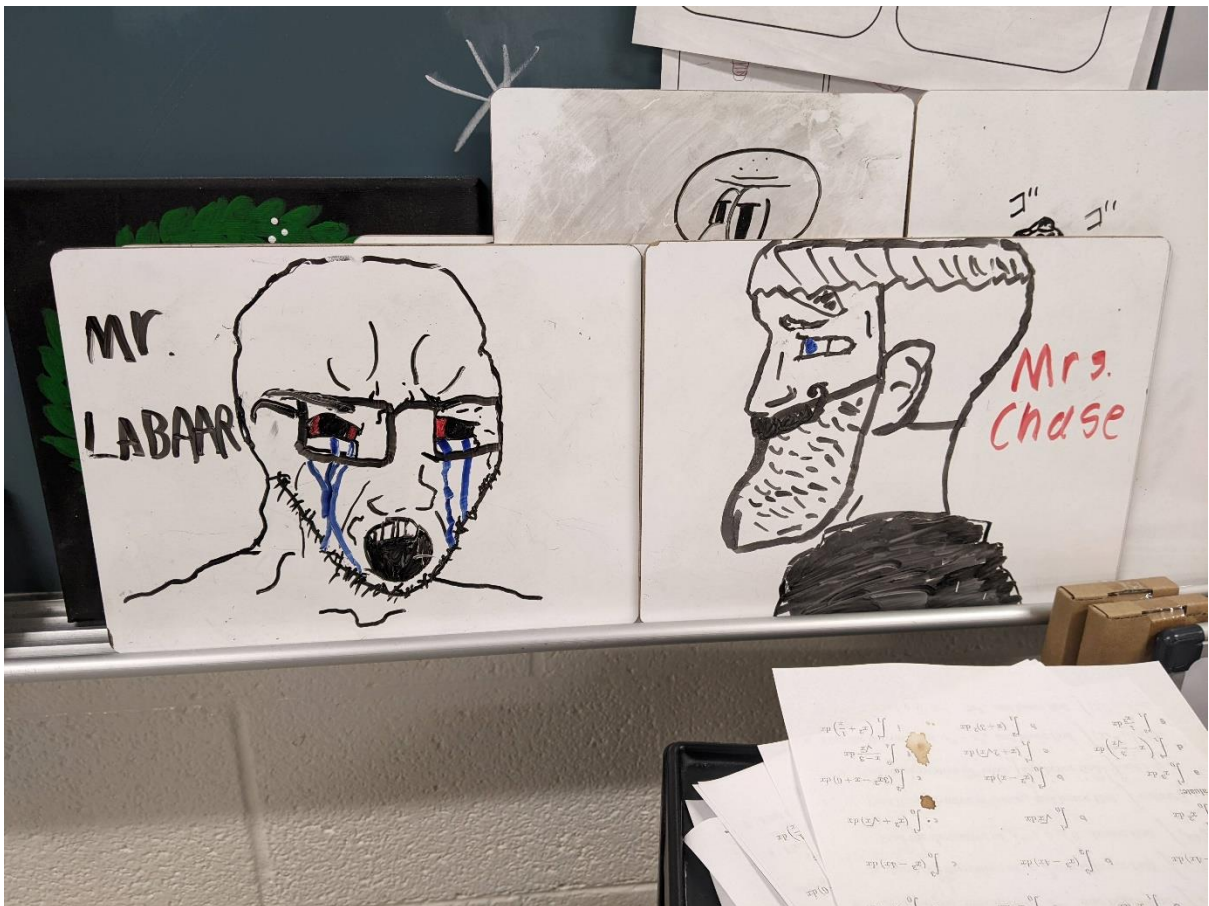
The remainder of the walls are rather plain compared to these two sides of the room. On the wall where the entrance door is located, a large green chalkboard is hung, and it appears a student has drawn a large flower. Three-quarters of the flower is visible, with the center of the flower in the top right corner of the board, and long, tapering, pointed petals extending across the board. The whiteboards on the back wall of the classroom are unused, as well as one of the bulletin boards. The other bulletin board on the back wall contains more student art, similar in style to the art that can be seen at the front of the room. On the back wall in the corner by the large storage cabinet is a second door. About 25 desks make up the center of the room. They are almost lined up in almost neat rows and columns. One of the desks has a chair pushed in backwards facing the back wall of the room. There are no windows in this room.

*Pictures of the IB Space*

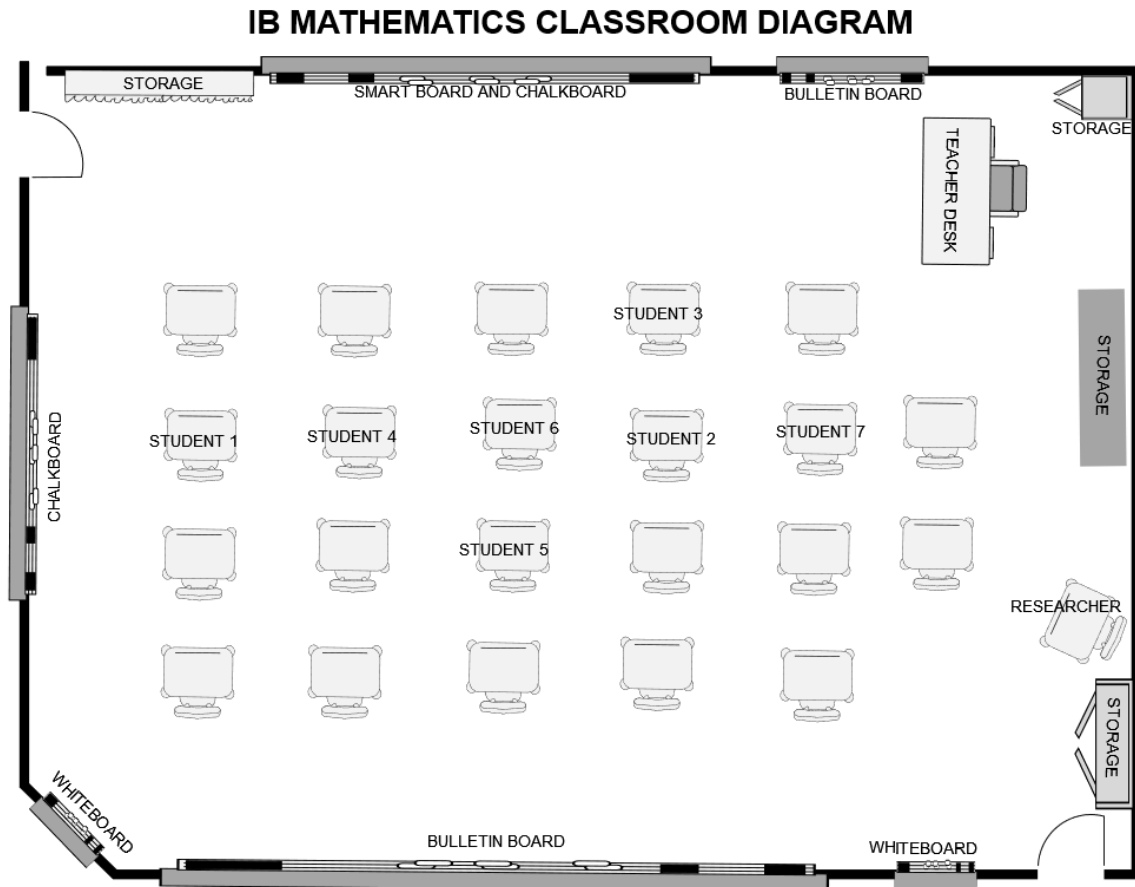








## *IB Classroom Site Diagram*



## **Tabletop Role-Playing Club**

The roleplaying club took place in the school's library. When entering the school, to the right of the main entrance, the library's location is indicated by a sword-shaped sign hanging from the ceiling, with the tip of the blade pointing to the right, and "LIBRARY" painted on the blade. The entry wall of the library is made up of glass windows with blue painted metal frames and occasional brick pillars. You enter through glass double doors and walk through two theft detectors. To either side of you are metal wire shelves with a small selection of books, and directly in your line of sight you can observe a menagerie of stained pine furniture, tables large and able to accommodate eight to ten people, and chairs and couches with blue woven upholstered cushions. These chairs and tables are outlined and set apart in the center of the room by stained pine bookshelves. There are two four-foot-tall



shelves parallel to the entry doors, roughly 20 feet into the room, one to either side of the entry doors. On the right side of the library are several six-foot tall, stained pine bookshelves filled with young-adult reading levels books. This line of shelves is continued catty-corner in the back left and right corners, as well as along the back wall, lit up by the afternoon sun spilling through the wall of windows facing the school parking lot.

The left side of the library from the entry way contains seven circular tables at bar height, with four barstool-height blue plastic chairs at each. At the front corner (left of the entry doors) is the librarian's desk; it is catty corner, has a stained pine desktop and a black chalkboard painted front face, covered in motivational, school spirit messages. On the desktop are various office paraphernalia, including a copier, papers, computer monitors, etc. Behind the desk are two grey and black upholstered office chairs and a few library carts with a smattering of books waiting to be re-shelved. Next to this, the left wall of the library has several doors, to hallways, to offices, and emergency exits. Some are closed, with the rooms behind dark. The door closest to the librarian's desk, however, is opened and the hallway behind the door is bright and active, with teachers bustling around wrapping up their days. Creating a line dividing this part of the library and the central cluster of tables is a brick pillar. On this brick pillar, a desk was installed to wrap around the pillar at bar height, covered in wood-grain contact paper. There are four desktop computers on this desk, one for each face of the pillar. Each computer has a bar height blue chair for users.

When I entered, I beat PL to the room, but all his students had already arrived; it was as if as soon as the bell indicating the end of the day sounded, they teleported to the library. They had broken down into their groups but had not yet sat down, milling about, and choosing their tables. Conversation was loud, boisterous, and students were smiling. PL entered from the hallway by the librarian's desk, carrying a large bin filled with supplies including Dungeons and Dragons books, papers, writing utensils, and more.

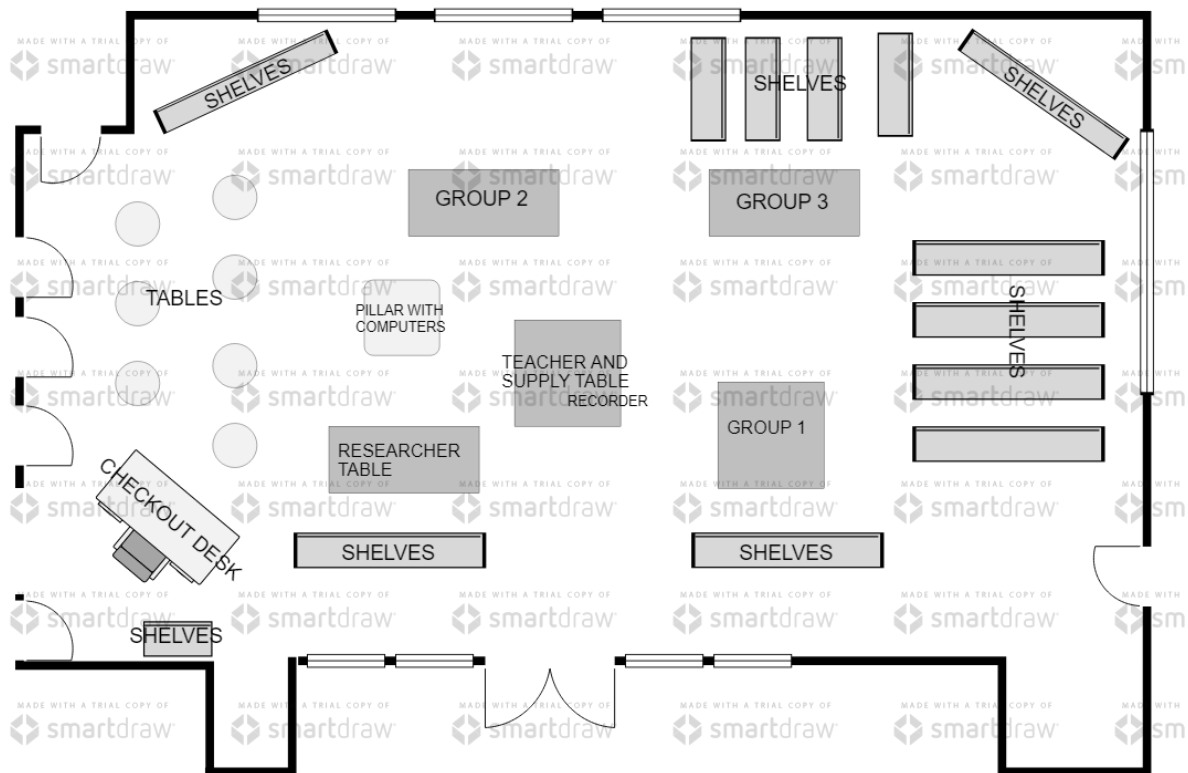
*Pictures of Club Site*







## Club Site Diagram



## 10-Minute Transcription Excerpt

### IB Classroom: Observation 1

[00:06:15] **S2:** *Bring my dance competition here?*

[00:06:16] **PL:** *Yeah.*

[00:06:17] **S2:** *I mean, we could, it's at a school in [REDACTED LOCATION], so there's no difference between doing it there and doing it here.*

(2022.04.06 RN: PL uses sarcasm to build rapport with these students.)

[00:06:23] **PL:** *Um, so y'all's group y'all's group not here today?*

(2022.04.06 RN: IB students participate in the D&D club.)

[00:06:27] **S2:** *No. (S2 pauses.) Now my allergies are all messed up, so we're having a fun time.*

[00:06:39] **PL:** *Everybody's, I keep seeing this article about how this is the worst Virginia allergy season ever been.*

(2022.04.06 RN: PL is speaking to this student with a sense of rapport more akin to friendship than what I'd see from a teacher.)

[00:06:47] **S2:** *I mean, I usually have bad pollen allergies, but the school I was at was still closed because of COVID because it was a private school. And so there's black mold there, which made my allergies worse.*

[00:07:00] **PL:** *I don't know if it was just black. If it was black mold, you'd just be dead. Right? I think it might--*

[00:07:04] **S2:** *No, not necessarily.*

[00:07:08] **PL:** *But black mold is like lethal mold.*

(2022.04.06 RN: PL seems to be poking at this student for information in a way that builds rapport, but also because he genuinely isn't sure about black mold.)

[00:07:11] **S2:** *But it isn't.*

[00:07:12] **PL:** *The whole point of black mold. That's why you really don't want black mold. Cause it's like it'll, it'll uh,*

[00:07:17] **S2:** *I think that depends on the degree of black mold. I don't, I don't think that's all black mold in general.*

[00:07:26] **PL:** *Okay. There's a specific, apparently there's more than one type of black mold, with a specific of black mold that's like...*

(OC: Student 3 enters the room and sits at a desk.)

[00:07:33] **S2:** *Thank you, [PL].*

[00:07:34] **S3:** *Why are we talking about mold?* (OC: as if wondering what on earth they walked into. Confused but entertained.)

[00:07:36] **S2:** *Because the last dance competition I had was in a school that was still closed because of COVID and they had black mold because no one had been in there so long. And my allergies were so bad and I was like, okay, I've had a sore throat for like three days. I*



*need to go take a COVID test. And so I did, it was negative. So I'm here now. And I literally had to sit in my car and wait for my results before they, because like, I didn't want to get other people sick, so I couldn't go to my studio, but they were like, you need to be here as soon as you get those results. And I was like, o-KAY, I was sitting in my car. (OC: heavy increase in volume and emphasis, as if irritated.)*

(2022.04.06 RN: This student seems to control a lot of the conversation in this class. I found out later she is the dungeon master for one of the D&D games in the after school club.)

[00:08:11] **S3:** *You could've just sat at home. And then drive to the studio.*

[00:08:18] **S2:** *I get to play a boulder now in one of my productions. So.*

(2022.04.06 RN: S2 changes the subject, could be tired of talking about her allergies?

Thought of a funny story S3 and PL would enjoy?)

[00:08:21] **S3:** *What?*

[00:08:22] **S2:** *I get to push a boulder across the stage. Cause it's an Indiana Jones themed one and so we have a big inflatable boulder. I don't know. Um, and so I get to push it across the stage.*

[00:08:30] **PL:** (PL walks across the room and turns the front most light off.) *I met one of the trees in our Wizard of Oz. (OC: states with a rise in pitch.)*

(2022.04.06 RN: Trying to relate to how silly high-school level productions can be sometimes?)

[00:08:33] **S2:** *Really?*

[00:08:33] **PL:** *Yeah. I didn't know you get to play a tree.*

(2022.04.06 RN: PL seems almost excited or entertained that this is an idea that emerges in high school productions.)

[00:08:37] **S2:** *Yeah.*

[00:08:37] **PL:** *That you get to throw apples at people.*

(2022.04.06 RN: PL sounds an awful lot like he thinks this would be fun.)

[00:08:40] **S2:** *Dang. They should have given an apple that job.*

[00:08:42] **PL:** *So they have--.*

[00:08:43] **S2:** *Yeah.*

[00:08:43] **PL:** *--apples like--.*

[00:08:45] **S2:** *I mean throwing apples, just throw apple. Just pick him up from the ensemble just WHAM.* (S2 and PL laugh loudly, as if imagining a giant apple throwing apples at people.)

[00:09:01] **PL:** *A giant apple--a guy in an apple costume? And they throw apples?*

[00:09:20] **S2:** *Precisely, but I wouldnt [INDISCERNABLE]--.*

[00:09:22] **UNKNOWN:** [INDISCERNABLE] (PL walks to pace outside of the classroom door, directing students to their classroom, coffee in hand. Students are engaging in chit-chat quietly.)

[00:09:22] **S2:** *I think it would be nice. I don't think I've used much of the pink one, but this preference, like, I use it for like trim or like a pocket or something. I wouldn't use it a lot.*

[00:09:33] **S3:** *I'm going to use it as a [INDISCERNABLE].*

[00:09:35] **S2:** *I sound like I smoke a pack a day.*

(2022.04.06 RN: S2 again steers the conversation in a different direction related to her interests or self.)

[00:09:43] **S3:** *Hm?*

[00:09:43] **S2:** *I sound like I smoke a pack a day.*

[00:09:46] **S3:** *You're just basically, sewing that [INDISCERNABLE].*

[00:09:49] **S2:** *I thought you were gonna say gluing, And I was like--.*

[00:09:52] **S3:** *I was about to say gluing!*

[00:09:56] **S2:** *Um.*

[00:09:57] **S3:** *You know me a little too well because that's exactly what I was going to say.*

[00:10:01] **S2:** *You have a rip in that shirt.*

[00:10:02] **S3:** *I know. And I [INDISCERNABLE] tights, and my mother was like, oh, you need to make sure you leave early because it's foggy.*

[00:10:07] **S2:** *Oh yeah, it's very foggy.*

[00:10:09] **S3:** *It's very foggy, but the only place that I had absolutely any issue was my driveway. And that's just simply because I couldn't see up the hill, but you know, headlights should have them on. But then one person that didn't have their headlights on. And when they saw me--.*

[00:10:35] **S2:** *Cause, you're not supposed to have headlights on. You're supposed to have parking lights on because headlights can reflect a lot off of the water droplets in the air.*

(2022.04.06 RN: S2 sounds a little concerned? Or all knowing? Unsure but there is some kind of weight present behind the words.)

[00:11:20] **S3:** *I thought you could have your headlights on, you just weren't supposed to turn your high beams on.*

[00:11:22] **S2:** *No. (Pauses.) Well, I don't dance until six, but it's an hour away and I need at least three hours to get ready and my call time's, well, it would have been two hours ahead of time, but they don't open the doors until six. (As if exasperated. Pauses.) 1:30. So it's not that bad, but yeah, I already put my note in to Ms. [REDACTED TEACHER NAME]. Ms.*

*[REDACTED TEACHER NAME].*

[00:12:02] **S3:** *Oh Ms. [REDACTED TEACHER NAME]. It sounded like you put a P in front of it, I was like what?.*

[00:12:07] **S2:** *Ms. [REDACTED TEACHER NAME WITH A P]?*

[00:12:08] **S3:** *That's exactly what it sounded like both times you said it. (Both laughing.) I'm going to blame your voice right now.*

[00:12:22] **S2:** *Probably.* (PL marches quickly back into the room and sits at his desk. He types quickly on the laptop to his right, stands up and moves over to the laptop to his left. The right laptop seems to be connected to the smartboard.)

[00:12:23] **PL:** *Why did I do what? What did I do?* (As if pretending to be exasperated.)

[00:12:25] **S4:** *There's fractions...* (OC: as if pretending to be shy and/or complain.)

[00:12:26] **PL:** *What fractions? Fractions are beautiful. Fractions are beautiful.* (OC: as if defying the student's thoughts.)

[00:12:37] **S2:** *You're a fraction and you're beautiful.*

(2022.04.06 RN: another comment, maybe hoping for attention?)

[00:12:57] **UNKNOWN:** *Skee ball, skee ball, pick 'em up, put 'em back.* (This was a clear statement by a teacher in the hallway, unrelated to class. PL walks to the chalkboard at the front of the room where the student concerned about fractions is waiting.)

[00:13:24] **S3:** [INDISCERNABLE].

[00:13:25] **S2:** *Not with goldfish, those need to be whales.*

[00:13:31] **S3:** *I'm imagining a bag of fake cheese whatever, and her other outfit is kind of*  
[INDISCERNABLE] *back to me.*

[00:13:33] **S2:** *Oh it's these slides.*

[00:13:33] **Admin:** *It's now time for your morning announcements. Please stand and remove your hat for the pledge to the flag. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.* (PL walks back towards his desk, hand over heart, as the Pledge is being said.) *Please pause for a moment of silence.*

(2022.04.06 RN: No one says the pledge alongside the admin, and only PL and a couple students place their hands over their hearts.)

[00:14:13] **Admin:** *All right. Thank you guys. You may have your. Seats. So, today is--*

[00:14:25] **S2:** *[PL]. .*

[00:14:27] **Admin:** *.....--An A-day. Please follow your--*

[00:14:29] **S2:** *[PL].*

[00:14:29] **Admin:** *--A-day schedule. Teachers:*

[00:14:30] **S2:** *Did you see the photo of [INDISCERNABLE] that someone drew on the desk? Students will be coming into your rooms into your rooms*

[00:14:31] **Admin:** *if they show up, just go ahead and admit students to your rooms. They will not have tardy passes today, so, this morning. So--*

[00:14:41] **S2:** *[INDISCERNABLE] (PL walks around student desks over to S2.)*

[00:14:41] **S2:** *--if a student shows up to your room, please admit them to your room. Uh, let's see what we got going on today.*

[00:14:55] **PL:** *He's drawn better.* (PL wanders back to the teacher desk and adjusts the various papers scattered about his desk as if he is preparing for and waiting to start class at the end of the announcements.)

[00:14:56] **Admin:** *Drama club--*

[00:14:57] **S2:** *Dang.*

[00:14:57] **Admin:** *--is going to meet during focus today. The AP art studio and IB Visual Art will be having their art show Tuesday evening from six to eight in the commons. Please stop and see their hard work and artistic skills. Again, AP studio art and IB--*

[00:15:37] **S2:** *[loud sneeze]*

[00:15:39] **Admin:** *--Visual Art will be having an art show on Tuesday evening from six to eight in the commons, please stop by and see their hard work and artistic skills. The*

*[INDISCERNABLE] is an international competition, students design and build underwater remote operated vehicles to complete tasks underwater. On Saturday, March the 19th, [REDACTED HIGH SCHOOL NAME] sent three teams to the* (PL walks over to the



classroom door. He sits at the student desk nearest to the door and chats quietly with S1 and S4.) *regional event. [REDACTED STUDENT NAMES] finished in the top third.*

*[REDACTED STUDENT NAMES] (IB students laugh.) represented [REDACTED HIGH SCHOOL NAME] and placed sixth at the international competition. A second place finish went to [REDACTED STUDENT NAMES]. Congratulations!*

### **Field Notes and Journal**

Going into these observations, I think I found myself assuming that everyone loves learning as much as I do. That is not necessarily true, and especially for high school students who are dealing with a number of social and emotional components of their environment. I also did not expect the after-school club to be as large as it was: in such a rural, conservative area I had anticipated little interest and engagement in a game centered around magic and mysticism that had a reputation for being related to “satanism” in the 1970s-1990s, but there were about 20 kids present. PL even noted that a group of six to eight students were out that week. Throughout this observation, engagement manifested in ways I did not expect.

I decidedly placed myself on the observer part of the continuum. I allowed myself to show emotion on my face, I was friendly if a student looked in my direction, but as no one engaged me I simply sat to the side and quietly took notes, listening to the events as they unfolded. I made this decision since I did not pursue IRB approval for this project and wanted to avoid any ethical conundrums that could come along with interacting with minors. Despite this, the students were aware of my presence. In the IB calculus class, they glanced in my direction, but generally actively ignored me. It is uncertain if they adapted how they interacted with PL or each other or changed how they engaged with the work. Because these are IB students, however, there may have been an unconscious motivation to perform in a way they thought someone may have wanted to see. With respect to the roleplaying club observation, the students seemed to be so absorbed in their groups that they were completely

oblivious to my presence, just as they seemed to filter out when other teachers walked in or out of the room.

The observations were extremely different. The IB Calculus class was highly structured, highly interactive between the teacher and students, and was very small as far as class sizes go. In contrast, the club was large, boisterous, lacked structure and students were working independently in their groups with minimal interaction between PL and the students. To this end, during the observations, I focused my energy on the behaviors of the teacher, PL. When I could, I noted small gestures, facial expressions, and small details around body language. This was surprisingly easier during the club meeting than the IB Calculus class, as during the club PL spent a large amount of time working separately from the tabletop groups, silently grading. The IB Calculus class, however, was filled with interactions. While my focus was still PL's behavior, I often needed to note broader behavioral antecedents and subsequent occurrences, and larger components of body language. I felt smaller details evaded me more than I would have liked during that observation.

### **Subsequent Interview Plan**

I feel I learned quite a bit about student engagement and observed a lot of behaviors relating to how PL helps students regulate and exercise their own creativity and decisions. I feel foggy still, though, on how that self-direction manifests in math class, and if there's a connection in how these skills and competencies, and even components of identity manifest and develop across these contexts. I think during the interview, I should make sure I focus on how PL sees these skills manifest holistically, as well as how he fosters them differently with respect to context. I also think inquiring about if he thinks self-regulation and self-direction are important, and if so in what ways, could be illuminating and core to the route I'm trying to pursue.

I think following up with PL is important. In an ideal world, I might want to interview students, the paraprofessional PL works with, and/or maybe the school's IB coordinator. However, with respect to the bounds of the assignment and time, I think interviewing PL's spouse may be beneficial. I am aware that the two of them speak deeply about educational theory, their experiences during teaching, and the establishment of the after-school club PL runs. I also am aware that the two of them are switching schools to teach at the same high school next year, and frequently collaborate on educational projects. I think that close collaboration could give me a nuanced view on these topics, even if it is not the ideal interview participants.