

Liza Raino-Ogden  
Student Teaching Reflection  
Winter 2022

Though I have been student teaching for only seven weeks, I feel that I have learned more in that time than during all of my academic classes combined. This is not to say that I haven't learned a great deal from those classes, but rather being present in a classroom on a daily basis has shown me what life as a teacher can be. It can be joyful, frustrating, filled with energy, exhausting, exhilarating, and filled with pride... all in the same day. I have seen students hit extremely high highs, only to crash down to a depressingly low low, and vice versa. My days at West Park Academy of Fine Arts have most definitely been filled with more learning than teaching as these students have shown me the true meaning of creativity, patience, and understanding. While I have learned a lot about lesson planning, I have definitely learned more about classroom management, who I am as a teacher, and how to work to build and maintain positive relationships with students.

While there have been many take-aways from my time at West Park, one of the biggest is my idea of classroom management. This is due in large part to my cooperating teacher, Mr. Perez. He is uniquely able to be strict and firm but also caring and understanding. He is the one who is constantly in the hallway during passing periods ensuring that the students are being safe, and is likely the only voice to be heard, yelling above the crowd telling the students to settle down. He has no conception of "not my student, not my problem," and actively works to ensure safety and decorum every moment of the day. True, this makes some of the students question why he's "getting in their business," but he works hard to make them understand that it's because he cares, and he is not going to stop caring about them, even if they don't care about themselves.

It is this attitude of strength but understanding, strict discipline with intense caring that I hope to bring with me to my future school. I want to make sure that the students know where the line is, but also ensure they know why the line is there. I want to ensure that every student knows how much I care

about them, their education, and future success, and that nothing that happens during the school year will change that. Additionally, something I'm working on with my students at the moment, is helping them to start to take responsibility for some of their own actions, whether it was a bad choice they made socially, or the fact that we don't give out grades but rather that students earn them. This ties directly into my advocacy for restorative justice, as one of the biggest tenets of that practice is helping students to take responsibility for their actions and work to set things right.

My second biggest take away has been the necessity of learning to go with the flow. There are so many things that can interrupt a regularly scheduled day; from a class-wide disappointment, to a week of making shoes, to a rescheduled IEP meeting. For me, it has been important to remember that things are not always going to go as planned, and that some of the best lessons are the ones that pivot with the times. For example, after giving a lesson on converting improper fractions to mixed numbers, it became abundantly clear that every single one of my sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes could do with a lot of reviewing of long division. After pivoting on the spot, we spent a few memorable lessons relearning the algorithm and why it works. Had we simply continued on without this review, the lessons would have been almost unbearable for my students.

Not only that, but going with the flow can also mean taking a moment when it is clear that the students need it. As I mentioned above, there was one day when a class-wide disappointment had clearly thrown the entire group into disarray. (They had, as a large class, wanted to throw a surprise party for their general education teacher as they had made her cry the day before. Every student brought in treats or a gift to show their apology. However, as the security office didn't approve of misbehaving students throwing a party, they rightly shut it down, saying that to show their appreciation for their teacher, they should first improve their behavior.) After realizing that they needed some space to share their feelings, Mr. Perez and I started a peace circle, allowing each student time to speak.

Though it took the entire period, it was clear that this was time that was necessary for the kids in order for them to be productive for the rest of the day.

While I have learned so much more from this experience, those two ideas will be hard to forget. I have loved watching Mr. Perez interact with his students, and have been working to build relationships with them that rival his own. I know that Mr. Perez has taught me so much, but I do believe too that each student has taught me something different. I have seen students who come in every day excited to learn, and students who come in every day and refuse to learn. I have seen some students come out of their shell and realize that something they perceived as hard is not actually too difficult, and some students find that they can actually begin to help others. Every day has been a challenge, but it has also been a challenge in which I have been excited to participate. I know my time is coming to a close, and I know that I will miss these students—my first students—with all my heart.