

My Teaching Journey  
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Prologue

When I was five years old, I had written down on a little star next to my kindergarten photo that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up. I loved my teacher; she was the nicest person I had ever met!

When I was in first grade, I write my letters backwards and which caused my teachers to believe I was dyslexic; I was sent to a reading specialist. Turns out it was nothing to worry about, just me trying to adapt since I was left handed. I thought I had to do everything backwards since I knew I wrote with the opposite hand as everybody else. While I was with this specialist, I loved it! I was getting candy and small tokens for reading books at home, but it was so easy! I never felt “weird” or “stupid” for going to get help with my reading from my teachers or classmates, I saw it as a privilege.

School continued to have small struggles for me through middle elementary school. In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I struggled with learning my multiplication skills and in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I struggled with learning different genres of writing. 5<sup>th</sup> grade, however, was a huge year for me! I remember getting my first kindergarten buddy and being so excited to teach them. We would do projects and read with them, it was the favorite part of my week!

Teaching is the only thing that I ever wanted to do from a young age.

College Years

September 2008

I am so excited to be out of high school. While they were great years, there has to be better. School has been in session now for about a month and I am having a harder time adjusting than I thought. My hardest class I have so far is my Introduction to Writing class. My professor gave me the lowest score EVER on my paper. We were given a simple prompt to write about gender differences that were presented in our articles. We were asked to share our thoughts and dig deep into this topic, since it was the launching point of the unit. I tried my best, but it was challenging to not know what to expect or have a specific rubric laid out. I have always felt I am a strong writer, so naturally it was pretty upsetting to see a low score on this paper. After reading the comments, I do feel like it will help me become a better writer, but it has been a large hit to my confidence level. I realized that the comments were guiding me to a deeper level of thinking that does not always tie up neatly. I am going to have to learn to shift my thinking and put more thought into my writing.

April 2009

I had been waiting several weeks to hear back from the college of education, and I just got the email. I was standing outside of the MSU auditorium as I stared at the preview for a good five minutes before opening. I was wondering, "What if I didn't get in? Do you get a second chance? This is it! This is God's plan for me, regardless of what it is". I had been kind of worried because of my first semester. My writing class revealed a lot of room for growth and development, which I have, but I hope it did not mess up my chance of being accepted.

I opened it and it said that I was accepted! AHHH! I am so excited! I cannot believe it! I immediately called my parents to inform them of the good news. I had just spoken to them a few days prior worrying about a linguistics class. I was trying as hard as I could to continue my dream of becoming a teacher. When I called and shared the news, they were so elated! They said, "We are so excited and proud of you! You are going to make a great teacher". It felt like I was getting the one of the last "check marks" done in the list to becoming a teacher. Little did I know, it was actually going to be one of the first "check marks" on my actual teaching journey.

October 2011

I received my first senior placement in a fourth grade classroom that I would be creating my first lesson for! I had observed a few classrooms before, but this was the first time I would be getting to know the class and beginning to teach! I was placed in a Montessori school (which I had little experience with). When I first walked in to the classroom, I noticed so many new things. There was a stage that had a Smartboard behind it, a whole section with math blocks and activities, lots of mats, and a few round tables instead of traditional desks. When the students came in, they were obviously very practiced in routines and they knew how to work independently! They were given their work for the week and had to task manage to get those items done.

My mentor teacher taught me ways to make my lessons come alive so I was not just lecturing, I was making lessons interactive and the students were responding. Being a shy personality type, I have had low confidence, but I could feel

my confident growing. This growth was not just on the inside, it was showing on the outside.

February 2012

I was finally to my last semester of my senior year! I found out I was going to be in my first ESL (English as a Second Language) placement.

The placement was in a middle school and was two hours. One hour was a grammar class and the second was a study skills. The grammar class was what I would expect; they learned the rules of the language and worked on their speaking. The study skills were what was interesting. When I first heard I was going to be observing a study skills class, I assumed students would be goofing off or it would just be a place to come work quietly, but there was so much more happening. There was such an interesting dynamic between the teacher and student; it truly opened my eyes to a whole different side of teaching. They really depended on her and worked alongside one another.

April 2012

Graduation! I CANNOT believe I am actually graduating from college! While I am excited to have completed this big milestone, there are so many unknowns. I am unsure where I would be placed and I knew that I was going to be living at home, so that would be interesting.

Graduating was different from on high school, I did not just happen to make it through college, I worked hard and had many tears. I walked into Michigan State a very different person than the girl that walked across the stage of the Breslin.

May 2012

Just found out my placement!! I am going to be in Hazel Park in a second grade classroom. I cannot wait to be in a classroom for a full year! I was not too familiar with the areas, but I know there will be other MSU interns in the school that will be a new support system. So far, the living at home has been better than I thought. I miss my friends and having somewhere to go and someone to see all the time, but I am also enjoying being in my own room and having some space.

June 2012

I just left meeting my mentor teaching and taking my first visit of the school. It was really brief, but it seems like it will be a great place for me next year! The kids seem so small compared to the fourth grades and middle school students that I was placed with during the previous year. It was a brief visit, but I noticed that my future mentor seems to have good control over her students, as they walked perfectly in the hallways and did not speak. I was looking forward to learning so much from her next year!

August 2012

We have been working on setting up the classroom for the last week together. We have slowly begun to get to know one another. It has been a slightly rock start, as I just learned that my mentor thought very highly of the intern from the previous year. The previous intern, we will call her Jackie, now worked in the school teaching fourth grade. My mentor, Christine, spoke very highly of Jackie when we were preparing the classroom. Unfortunately, Christine was going to have a busy year, as she was not only my mentor, but also the mentor to Jackie (since she was a first year teacher). I found myself immediately trying to show Christine that I could live up to her standards and wanted to be as good, if not better, than Jackie.

October 2012

I have begun taking my own groups out to work during our daily five rotations! It has been so great and I think the kids are really getting to know me! There are a few that I have been working with closely, since their reading levels are very low. One of them, Luke, has taken a liking to reading with me and has already shown huge improvement in his comprehension. Interestingly enough, the second one, Brad, can hardly read a single word but is able to comprehend the book through the pictures. The rest of the class is a group of great kids, however, a few have already started to pose some behavior challenges. There is one girl, Lilly, who is very defiant. She antagonizes a few boys that are easily angered for fun.

November 2012

I have started to get to know the other interns in my group really well and am learning to enjoy our after school sessions with our field instructor, Bonnie. Having the chance to sit down and discuss the struggles we are having with managing work load, planning lessons, execution of lessons, and classroom discipline problems helps me to not feel so alone. As the year has progressed, most of the basic class behavior problems have died down. For a while, I had thought I was doing something wrong that was causing them to not respond correctly, but after having open discussions with the interns and Bonnie, I have learned that I am not alone in these struggles. We are about to be taking over a few subjects in the following months so that has also been a subject of discussion.

One of the hardest parts so far has been learning to not take my work home with me. Not the physical papers, but the emotional baggage. As I have gotten to know my students, I have learned about some of their home situations and they have shared things that have been very sad to hear. I was fortunate enough to have a fairly normal childhood, but I guess normal is relative to where you grow up and who you grow up around. For example, one of my students, Chris, was being really disrespectful and refused to do any work. I pulled him aside and asked him what was going on, as it was not his normal behavior, and he would not speak to me. I gave him a minute or so and all of the sudden he was crying. He shared that his dad had just left his mom. He missed him and it made him upset when they yelled at one another. This home occurrence had a huge affect on him and how he was behaving and learning at school. I was so thankful he shared and we could discuss it, but it is something that I have a hard time forgetting when I leave school.

January 2013

I have taken over the read aloud and the running of the daily five stations completely. A read aloud would seem to be easy, but my class gets restless after lunch, especially without outdoor recess. My kids have started to have some issues coming in after lunch; getting them to sit quiet and relax has been a real struggle. One of the other intern's mentors has been teaching her some yoga techniques that they do with their students. Maybe that is something to consider?

February 2013

Today was a disaster. DISASTER. The past month back from school I have been working on taking over more of the subjects and classroom. I am now in full control of the class and since coming back from break, I have been working on establishing some new rules and re-enforcing the old ones. They have done fairly well, but today was terrible.

We were in our daily five stations when Lilly decided to poke David. David is easily angered and they have not gotten along well lately, so he got up and started chasing after her in the classroom. I quickly worked to safely grab David, as he has been known to be very aggressive when he gets upset and cannot easily be snapped out of it. I looked at the other student's faces and saw that they were scared that David would hurt them without meaning to. Lilly was running around screaming, but seemingly unafraid. I was able to grab Lilly and place her behind me out of David's sight. She proceeded to hit me for pulling her aside. Fortunately, the



principal happened to be walking by, so I was able to get a student to grab her attention. She took David to a different room to calm him and took Lilly away. She was suspended for a few days. After this whole event, I knew it was only a few students, but was I doing something wrong? Should I have been watching her more closely? Did I respond in the right way? This incident was seemingly out of nowhere. I have had so many conversations with Lilly, but she seems to do better and then snap back to her old self.

March 2013

We only have about a month left, and it has gotten much better since last month. I figured out there was something going on at home with Lilly in the last month that has been causing her to look for extra attention. Since February, the rest of the students have been really good and have been responding to me well. We have done really interactive lessons with science and social studies; I have really enjoyed making the units my own! Many of my students have not done much traveling, so the other second grade intern and I created a Google Earth searching when studying landscapes and terrains. They loved it! It was a great experience and they were talking about these landmarks that we have them Google for days!

April 2013

Officially done with student teaching! Out to the real work and job searches...We went to a seminar where they gave us advice a few weeks ago, but it was more terrifying than helpful. There were so many things that they stated we

should not do because we did not want to give the wrong impression. There is a big job fair in the following week and I am anxious to go. I feel fairly confident that I should be able to find something, since they say that MSU is the best teaching school in the country. I also feel really prepared after my placement this year. I was confronted with so many situations that I had never dreamed I would run into. I feel like I know so much more about who I am as a person and as a teacher. While the year started out kind of rocky, it ended really well.

May 2013

Job fair...check! I felt like it went well, but I guess I won't know unless they call me. So far, I have not heard anything, but I think most people are still looking for jobs as well...

June 2013

I have had a few interviews and applied to about 70 jobs. It's still early, right? School has not gotten out yet, so many they do not know about all their open positions? My full time job currently is to apply for jobs. One email said that I was one of 954 applicants! I guess I had not realized how many other people I was going to have to compete against.

August 2013

So I was not able to find any full time teaching jobs. Admittedly, I might have made one too many assumptions about the ease of finding a job. Social media did

not help, as everyone that did was sharing it with the world. I was happy for them, but also wished I was in the same situation. In the middle of August, I was able to find a part time position as an At-Risk Paraprofessional in a charter school. It was not ideal, but it was something to get my foot in the door.

### September 2013

As we are wrapping up the month, I am really unhappy with my current job. I am used as anything the school needs, which is not what I signed up for. The students have threatened teachers, and a few are hitting teachers with no real consequences. I have also recently been put in charge of watching recess, which is not something I signed up for. I was looking forward to working with the kids that needed help with specific subjects, but my job has transformed like a chameleon.

### October 2013

I left my job as an At-Risk Paraprofessional. It was not satisfying any of the things that I was looking forward to doing and it will not help me further in a professional way. I will be looking for other jobs.

### November 2013

I reached out to a school that had offered me a job during the summer, but I declined due to distance (it was a charter company with sister schools, but the one sister school was over an hour away). Probably a mistake in hindsight... I called to see if there was an opening in the nearest school to me and they called me back!

They said they recently had received an opening for an Instructional Technician. It would be a full time job and I would be doing Title 3 work and helping to co-teach a kindergarten class. I was ecstatic! I was one step closer to getting the “dream classroom”. Although the last few months had been a challenge, it was proving to be worth it. Sometimes the best things in life do not come easy.

December 2013

I have been at my job for a little over a month and I love it! This school has a special focus in which they teach Arabic as a second language. The respect for teaching and attitude of the students is so different than my last school. The parents are really involved and help out a lot in the school; it has a very different school culture. I get to work with the ESL students in the school, but I mostly focus on the kindergarten ones. Last week, we got a new student from Pakistan that speaks no English. There were two students in our classroom that spoke Urdu, so they were able to help translate for us. He often seemed afraid of us and would run and hide if he thought he was in trouble. I later learned that the teachers would hit students back in his home school, which he thought we were going to do. I love having the opportunity to use my ESL skills with the new students and to see huge growth from them! The ESL placement and the brief experience with the paraprofessional position helped to prepare me for this job.

June 2014

I have successfully finished my first year (post certification)! While this job started out great, I still find myself desiring to be the lead of a classroom instead of a help or second teacher. I spoke to my principal and shared that I would like to have my own classroom the following year. The fourth grade teacher went on maternity leave, so I took over for the last three months and it was fantastic! Later, I found out the fifth grade teacher was going to be leaving the teaching profession, so I am hoping to be placed in her spot. My principal said that she would see what she could do for me this summer. All I have to do is have patience.

July 2014

I have been applying for other jobs on the consortium, just in case. I feel like I have not officially gotten anything and am curious to see what is out there. I would prefer to get into a public school, if possible. I found one job that was particularly interesting, it was a split job between ESL and teaching middle school English. I have never taught middle school, but my fifth grade teacher went from fifth grade to middle school over fifteen years ago and never came back. I always have thought it would be good to try middle school at some point.

August (beginning) 2014

There have been a few exciting updates! To start, I was offered the job at my same charter school as a fifth grade teacher! Also, I was called to interview for the middle school ESL and English job. I taught a lesson and then had a large group interview with a panel of administrators and teachers from the school back in the

middle of July. They went on break so I am waiting to hear back. The issue now is that I am going to be going to orientation for my current job in a few weeks and starting to set up my classroom; I do not want to get all organized and leave. More importantly, I do not want to meet parents and kids and then leave.

August (end) 2014

I just finished arranging desks in my classroom and getting the beginning of the year checklist done, when I got a call on my cell phone. It was the third interview (which I had been told was the last step)! Only problem was that they wanted to do it that night and I did not have any of my clothes and was at least a half hour from home. Fortunately, my brother was kind enough to drive in my interview clothes and I was able to go to a family friend's house to change.

I was trying to not get too excited about the opportunity, as I had been let down before. This job would get me into the public schools and into the district that I grew up in... how cool would that be?? After passing the approval of the assistant superintendent, I met the superintendent and he offered me the job! I couldn't believe it was really happening! I walked out to my car with the carefree and happy manor of a child when I suddenly realized I was going to have to tell my current school. I had mentioned to my principal I had interviewed and was waiting to hear from the summer, but I didn't expect much to come of it. I was never good at confrontation or delivering bad news; I tend to be the person to beat around the bush.

The next morning, I officially signed my contract. Now I had to call and let my old school know I was not returning. I sat in my car, sweating as I waited for the cell phone ringing to end when my old principal picked up. Finally, I heard her voice. I delivered the news and explained to her why I would not be showing up that morning. Fortunately, I had not brought any of my own belongings into the classroom yet, so I did not have to go back and pick up things. As I sat in my car feeling sad to have delivered the news, I also felt a sense of pride thinking of my journey. I had been through so many hardships and trials over the past few years. All I had wanted was to become a full time teacher in a public district, and all of this on the way had made this even more special. It had been worth it. The tears, doubt, and questioning had all helped me to become who I am today.

October 2014

I love my new job! I am split between two building and three classrooms, but no complaints here! I have been through so many situations where I have been confronted with other struggles that I have no reason to complain. I feel so fortunate to be in my position. I really love the people I work with and the kids I teach. We have conferences soon and I am so excited to be the “main teacher” and discuss their children with them.

April 2015

This year has flown by! I really have not had too many issues with my new job or school. The biggest possible change that may be in the works is being put at

one school instead of being split. The opportunity to be placed at two schools has been a blessing in disguise. Although it can be hard to travel and have to learn about two staffs and schools, it has given me the opportunity to see what staff I fit in with best.

June 2015

The school year is about to be over in three days and my principal at Smith just called and asked if I would be interested in joining their staff full time! I cannot express my excitement! I would love to be there full time! Wahoo! Once again, I see the repeated theme that each step in my journey has brought me to where I am today. I appreciate everything I have more because of what I have been through. I am so blessed and thankful!

August 2015

I am so excited to begin a new school year! I just found out that I was given my own classroom so that I will not have to be switching during the day! How great! I literally cannot think of one thing that would need to be changed to make my life better! I am so excited to get back to teaching with my colleagues and meet my new students. I feel like I am fully invested in one school and can participate more in the culture of the school.

Today (February 2016)



Now that I have been at one school and have one year's worth of experience teaching my subject material, I feel like a pro...(haha) NOT! My mentor has explained to me many times that it takes many years to master a curriculum, so I should not be too hard on myself. I am enjoying spending more attention on the curriculum and policies of one school and I feel that my teaching ability has really grown. I cannot picture myself anywhere else and want to be here for the rest of my career. Looking back, if I could speak to myself, I would share one big piece of advice. Trust that every step along the way is part of a bigger picture. Each person has his or her own journey and just because one seems easier, it does not mean that it is better.