Jerilee Cameron

Dr. Marlysue Holmquist

ED200 – Introduction to Education

23 January 2013

Learning Activity VIII

Throughout the entirety of this experience, I had the consistent feeling that this was exactly where I belonged. Though in the very beginning, I have to admit I was slightly apprehensive. I walked in to school on the first day and found that I felt like the new kid at school, with everyone’s eyes on me, judging my every move. I decided that this was not going to thwart my decision any, that I had better ride it out a little longer and to keep an open mind. With each day, the students became more and more comfortable with me, and by the third day, a miracle happened. One of the students had approached me with a question about citation! After that initial brave soul asked for help, there were a slew of other students who felt comfortable asking for my help. This was the beginning of my transformation from the awkward being at the back of the room to a bonafide teacher’s assistant.

Being accepted by the students was only one factor of the struggles that I faced. It was surprising how difficult it was to differentiate myself from the students, especially because of the narrow age gap between the seniors and myself. There were instances where, if I were a student, I would have joined in on the jokes being told or laughed about something immature, but I had taken on the title of a figurehead and had to act accordingly. This was made to be especially challenging when I found out that many of the older high schoolers and I shared some of the same friends. Not only did this fact remind me that I was terribly close to their age, but that I was still a normal kid, much like them. While I feel that this made my acceptance happen more easily, I still struggled to remind them that I was a teacher and not a fellow classmate.

Something that surprised me especially was all of the extra work that goes into being a teacher – it certainly isn’t an 8-4 job! Mrs. Molzahn was constantly kept busy, whether she was planning prom decorations, making arrangements for the KAY group, and grading papers. Oftentimes, her extra work would keep her in the classroom until eight-o-clock in the evening and later. Regardless of all this extra work, she always had a smile on her face and was excited to be of assistance to whoever needed her. I experienced this responsibility of extracurricular activities even as a teacher’s assistant and observer. I was asked to assist in two scholar’s bowls, play in the pep band at their basketball games, plan out and teach a junior English assignment, and even offer lessons to the struggling sixth-grade clarinetists. While it was difficult to juggle all of these newfound responsibilities, it was an absolute pleasure to be immersed in so much of the school’s various activities. I now know exactly what to expect when planning for my teaching workload, and it is much more than I first expected!

Another thing that I learned in my experience was what exactly employers are looking for when hiring prospective teachers. Since I am at a great school like Bethany, I am at an advantage. Many of the employers look to see where a person’s time and training were obtained to see whether or not they are credible. Something else of vital importance is the references that are listed on applications. If a person can get various principals, cooperating teachers, and other school-related references, then the application is much more likely to stand out and be selected. Throughout my teaching experience at Bethany, I will make sure to keep this in mind. The people that I work with now could certainly hold the key to my future employment.

All of this positive feedback is not to say that my time at Smith Center High School was flawless; there were times where I was genuinely disheartened. One of these instances happened during the junior English class. I overheard a girl talking about how much she hated school, what a waste of time it was, and how she could make a sufficient amount of money working as a nanny for her cousin and not have to finish high school. This is something that no teacher wants to hear his/her student say – all teachers hope and pray that they can make school fun and interesting for their students, to excite the insatiable hunger for knowledge. Something that I have come to realize is that, sadly, not all students are going to enjoy school. That is not to say that teachers should completely abandon their dreams of achieving this goal, but all prospective teachers should brace themselves for this harsh reality.

As a stark contrast to this, I also saw the love of English ignite in one of the students as well, and it was one of the most wonderful things I have ever experienced. While in the computer lab, working on their research papers, one of the freshman girls turned to Mrs. Molzahn and me and proceeded to tell us how much she had come to love this class, all because of this assignment. After class that day, we both reflected on what a wonderful feeling it was to hear the students enjoying learning. These will be the moments I live for in my own classroom, the moments that make all of the hard work and heartbreak worth it.

While I had some uncomfortable run-ins with the students, there were also a few occasional awkward moments with the faculty. Considering I am the youngest and most inexperienced person on the teaching team at Smith Center, I spent many a time in the teacher’s lounge during lunch, lost for words. The teachers around me would chat about “this student did that and this parent said this” and converse about their own children at home. I had absolutely nothing to contribute to the conversation! While this slightly made me feel like I bore a pariah status, I soon saw that the teachers had all established relationships amongst themselves. This helped immensely, not only to make lunchtime less awkward and quiet, but in order to build up support. Believe it or not, teachers are prone to weakness too, and it happened more than once that a teacher had to enlist another to help them with these weaknesses. I experienced this firsthand when I was asked to grade the narrative essays the business math class composed. Mrs. Armknecht, the math teacher, felt that she was not knowledgeable enough in math to grade the essays, so she asked me. I finally felt included in the secret society of the faculty.

While there were some ups and downs that I experienced in my 3 weeks of observation, the one thing that I learned for sure was that teaching is absolutely right for me. I felt a wonderful sense of fulfillment when in the classroom. I got up every day at 5:45 with a smile on my face, ready to make a difference in the students’ lives. While the end of my time here is very rapidly coming up, I feel a sense of loss. While I do not want to leave the class, I reflect on all of the valuable things I have taken away from this experience. I can say with certainty that I will enlist all of the tips and tools of the trade that I have gained in my own classroom. I eagerly await the chance for my turn to be the teacher, the difference in a child’s life.