

LEARNING TO TEACH

MY BACHELOR OF EDUCATION YEAR

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I came to Queen's University with absolutely no expectations. Although my dad was a secondary school science and physical education teacher, he was retired most of my adolescence and rarely spoke about teaching. All I knew was that teaching involved a lot of paperwork and politics, something I would hope to avoid in my career. I was nervous to meet the OEE crew I would be a part of for the next 8 months. After one week of field camp getting to know my outdoor and experiential education peers, I was in good shape! It was all hands on learning so far and I knew I was welcome and appreciated as a part of the group.



My first weeks at Queen's University taught me several things. As a teacher I will be expected to be an avid life-long learner, spend a lot of time planning for curriculum assessment and there was no way I was going to avoid the paperwork and politics. My first practicum was spent with a first-year, full-time teacher with whom I shared many similarities. I learned how diverse a class of students could be with respect to academics *and* behavior skills. I learned how to start with an empty classroom and allow students to fill it with their work. She allowed me the ability to trial teach and in mimicking the style I thought I should, I learned that teaching the traditional way may not be my style.

The fall came and went. I was overloaded with valuable information, especially from my OEE colleagues and curriculum classes. I spent more time organizing all my work than absorbing it. One day, when overwhelmed, a wise professor let me in on a secret... we weren't expected to take it *all* in. As professors, they were doing their best to give me all the information I will need to begin teaching in a very short period of time. In no way, was I expected to take it all in and incorporate it into every one of my lessons each practicum day. My perfectionist self breathed a sigh of relief. As Christmas break approached, my practicum was spent teaching a unit on Heritage and Identity and finishing a measurement unit in math,



which I enjoyed more than I thought I would. I learned new assessment techniques but often felt the stress of having to be the 'perfect' teacher each day. I learned that in my class, vulnerability *needs* to be a part of my classroom environment.



January came and went. Although we spend a lot of our time reflecting, I still hadn't had the physical time to process all of what was happening. I knew I was beginning to form

ideas of what I believed in, 2 months pleasing classroom teachers still didn't fully feel like my opportunity to experiment with my new ideas. It would have to take more practicum time or my own class in order to be able to test out my ideas. It was another wonderful time spent at school with the OEE crew before heading off to teach environmental education for 2 months.



For someone who is always organized and has a plan, I let my practicum guide me for a change. I found in my third practicum, I taught aboriginal education over and over again (something that was missing from the center). I also realized that while this was the type of job I want in the future, I will teach differently than the way my placement was set up. I will focus on reflection, critical thinking and teach environmental education alongside aboriginal education. In response to this, I created a document for the center to use in order to encourage visiting classroom teachers to incorporate reflective activities into everyday lessons in order to increase depth of knowledge and self-assessment.

This theme showed up again in my final placement, teaching environmental education in Queensland, Australia, only this time it was an intentional focus of the staff to use this pedagogy. Much like my first practicum, I spent the majority of my time observing, taking in a new curriculum, new environment and new culture (although teaching was surprisingly similar). I realized then, that environmental education may be similar around the world, but what changes are the values of each centre and the individuals that work there - something dynamic that I can have control over in myself. Whether I end up teaching in an independent, private or public school, I know I will always focus on environmental and aboriginal education.



The final weeks at Duncan McArthur have been another wonderful whirlwind of information. As we wrap up our final week, I will be sorry to lose

the everyday community of future teachers ready to get out there and approach education in their own way. Queen's has done an excellent job of creating a community of dedicated learners through the program organization, the courses offered and the example of the professors.



In the future, I will *definitely* be a life-long learner. I am already signed up for my special education AQ part 1 and will be teaching outdoor education for the Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board and for the Cataraqui Conservation Authority this summer. I plan to take my intermediate math AQ as well, when money and time allow. I have applied for several public school boards, as well as a handful of independent schools. The future holds environmental education, aboriginal education and teaching critical thinking and self-advocacy skills for my students.