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505 Final Reflection

Reflecting on this semester, *I ask myself, what is a teacher?* To some, it is a person that teaches a class and gets the summer off. And, if being a teacher is more than that, *what do they do?* In the broadest terms, teachers *make decisions*.

We make decisions in service to students by planning, implementing, and assessing. We provide effective teaching from our knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Of course, this is a very broad explanation. We must strive to know every student, build inclusive classrooms, and differentiate instruction to promote achievement for all. We must understand and work within standards, develop numerous different types of plans and assessments, and be able to clearly define goals. We are responsible for planning lessons and units, and create objectives within learning domains. We must have an arsenal of instructional strategies, teacher-centered and student-centered. We are also responsible for our classrooms, managing the physical space, but also creating a safe place for all of our students. We must collaborate with our colleagues and build supportive networks with one another. And, perhaps most importantly, we must connect with our students' families and our communities, to ensure our students reach their potential. The teaching profession is far more than "summers off," this is not a profession for everyone.

One of the most important things I've learned, from participating in class, the course material, and class observation, is that *I'm a very good learner*. What does it mean to be an "expert in English?" We will never know enough about our content area, but we are "knowledgeable professionals," and we excel at making *good decisions*. In the classroom we are modeling what it means to be a good learner, and that's better than being an English scholar.

Helping our students become good learners is one of the most important things we can do as teachers. This is a strategy, a mindset, an attitude, that crosses all content areas, into all aspects of life in the 21st century. Embracing student-centered instruction is another way we can extend our students' learning. Project-Based schools, Problem-Based Learning, and Place-Based Education are taking prominence over tired, old, models of education. We need to select tools that help students design and personalize their learning experience, inspire them to be accountable to themselves. We need to collaborate with outside organizations and professionals to create dynamic, challenging instruction to access higher tiers of learning for students.

Given that we are expert learners, it's essential that we be lifelong learners. How can we be models for our students if we don't "practice what we preach?" In my host classroom, I worked with students that used my host teacher's words and actions. I've seen students emulate mannerisms and body language of my host teacher. If we embrace inquiry, curiosity, and seek continuing growth, our students will too. The world is changing faster than any time in history, we must "try" to keep up with it; that means learning new strategies and technologies. How can we be innovators when we are using stale, old tools?

Well, that all sounds great! Where do we get the time? The brutal reality is that teachers make sacrifices. That's why many of us won't make it. That's probably why there is a shortage of

teachers. Simply put, we find the time. It's part of being a professional. That means long hours, weekends, dutifully working during those "summers off." I'm a diligent student, I take my work very seriously, and I'm guilty of neglecting people close to me for the pursuit of my academic and professional goals. One of my worries is that I could see teaching taking over my life. "Self-care," is a phrase that has stuck with me over the past week as I've been working long hours to finish my semester. I need to be mindful of creating a healthy "work-life" balance. Another thing I want to embrace is collaboration with my peers, by sharing plans and ideas we can all save more precious time. I'm a very creative person and I enjoy building my own graphic organizers, worksheets, and handouts; I sometimes spend hours drawing and making illustrations for lessons. Sometimes this is fun, but a lot of the time, *it's just a lot of extra work*. I need to start utilizing more resources online instead of designing everything myself.

One of things my host teacher said more than once, is that "You have to enjoy doing this. If you don't, you will be miserable. It's OK to be tired at the end of the day, you will be, but you have to want to come back tomorrow morning." As this semester closes, I am tired. I'm very tired. And I'm glad I'll get a little time away. But, if I had class Monday morning, I'd be happy to wake up and go.