

Teaching EL at Smithton Middle School

Project Capstone: Kaya Macleod Capstone Project.pptx

Despite a slow start with getting placed in an internship, I believe I found the best possible place to intern, at Smithton Middle School with the English Learning teacher, Marlene Mullen. These are the kids with limited to no knowledge of speaking, reading, writing, and interpreting the English language. The environment is fast-paced and welcoming, and the kids are so willing to learn. In my 13 years of schooling, I don't think I have ever seen kids so keen. They are eager to pick up the language, and the practice they do feels fresh to me. They aren't practicing being able to spit back information or memorize steps to a math problem. Just by speaking, they are practicing learning a whole new language. I have been in Spanish classes since the eighth grade, but my language learning has been driven by wanting to learn a new language, not because I was in a country where I didn't understand how most people talked. I feel like I can make an actual impact on these kids' ability to thrive by just talking and getting to know them.

The personal connection with the kids that I have developed is simply indescribable. I look forward to going to my internship and seeing the little middle schoolers every morning. The positives of this position have not only included building strong relationships with the kids but also in developing my patience. Frequently, I work with a specific student from South Korea with very limited English. He knows more than he gives himself credit for, and when things get difficult, he gives up and resorts to going quiet and interacting in a way he knows is not correct. With him, I have to think through my asks of him very carefully. I want him to stay confident in his knowledge and not have him feel the need to shut down. He's a smart kid, but with as challenging as it is to learn a new language, he feels the pressure and decides against the struggle. It tests my patience most of the time I work with him, because I know he can do it, but I just can't do it for him, which is very difficult for me. I have to let him work through the mental block that prevents him from applying his own capabilities. But, I applaud him for every effort, no matter how small, and meticulously choose my words to make sure that he doesn't start doubting himself. In our last unit, we were working on talking about sequential events. I don't start by asking him, "What is your morning routine?" Instead, I start with a simple question, such as what he had for breakfast, then what did you do right after breakfast, and then what time he got up, and so on, before I ask him to string together a full description of his mornings with transition words and different tenses. One of my favorite things about this internship has been seeing his personal growth in not only English, but his confidence in his communication skills.

Conversing with the students and getting to know them better has been amazing since they all have such interesting lives, and I enjoy that they are able to share their journey to Columbia with me. This internship has given me an extremely beneficial insight regarding my future career. Although I loved my internship, I don't see myself being able to work as a teacher, especially

with middle schoolers daily. I enjoyed building relationships with the kids but not the lesson planning, and seeming to do somewhat similar things every day. In the future, and as I become more fluent in specifically Spanish, I would love to work in a foreign country to communicate and teach kids English outside of a classroom setting.