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Student Teaching

By Meghan McElroy

What is there to say about this semester? There will never be enough words to convey the beauty and the goodness: both of my students and the incredible blessing of teaching history. I will do my best to explain a small portion of what this semester has taught me, but be aware that this article is by no means exhaustive.

There was a great deal of doubt and uncertainty surrounding my student teaching semester, but it did not take long to realize that most of this doubt was never mine in the first place. I don't think I ever possessed any doubt about my ability or my passion to teach.

In elementary school, I came home from class and taught on a whiteboard to my dog, Misty. When my mom got home from work and asked me what I'd learned, she'd receive in-depth retellings of the stories I had heard in history. By middle school, I was tutoring students in and out of class and looked forward to it. By high school, I was sure I wanted to teach, and I wanted to teach the subject that made the most profound impact on my life: history. I had seen the impact my teachers and my content had made to my life, and I was ready to pursue it.

But while I was sure and excited about the career and mission of teaching, our society displayed a strange disdain for the profession. Most people can agree how important teachers are and share beautiful stories of the teacher that changed their life. They will still look at you sideways when you say you want to teach.

When you say you want to teach, they ask "really? Are you sure?" They remind you that you will be underpaid and undervalued, and that kids are awful and don't want to learn. "Why would you want to be a teacher when you could be a doctor or a lawyer? You're so smart," they will tell you. Another big one is "Oh, I could never be a teacher." Those comments over the years built up doubt over a foundation of passion and love for my content and mankind.

Throughout this semester, my students' thoughtfulness and the joy of teaching a subject that has been so good to me washed all of this doubt and built on it more love and more passion. I now have no doubt

that my teaching career will be a mighty fortress built by the lives I touch and the stories and lessons I tell.

I will describe the merits of my student teaching semester first in terms of content, and then in terms of my students. History has been my lens to view the world and life: where society has been and what it should be, who I am and the person I desire to be. History is all about relationships and progression. It's about failures, triumphs, and learning from it all.

This world often feels unpredictable and uncertain. History helps make sense of it all. The study of history has grounded me and uplifted me, and it is my greatest pleasure to bestow that onto others. It is difficult to mold the world and society if you do not understand it. I love being a part of that process and giving students a place to think through the hard parts of life. When I taught the enlightenment, students learned about people who looked around, thought about what was wrong in society, and sought for ways to fix it. From there, I got to ask questions like "when you look at our society, what do you wish was different?" I watched my students talk out issues such as homelessness and racial inequality in their community and country. What an honor it is to be a piece of that conversation.

I get to tell story after story of everyday people seeing injustice in their communities and pursuing change. There is something spectacular about watching students realize that can be them. There is something incredibly special about students' perceptions of the world changing. Through the study of history and the social sciences, students make this transition from passive to active members of society. They realize that the world is not happening to them, they are happening to the world. That's a blessing. What an honor it is to be a part of that.

The beauty of history and the social sciences is the ability of it to be shared. I love learning about history. I'm fascinated and intrigued, and there is never enough. But, to teach history. That is what it is all about. You can study all the history in the world but until you share it, what is its value? Being a student of history is wonderful, but being a teacher of history is even better. I am part of the preservation and advancement of history, and that is such a tremendous honor.

As for my students, where do I even begin? I wish everyone could meet them. The people who are pessimistic about the future of this country, this world, should spend more time in a classroom. Despite

hardships and struggles that are by no means their doing, my students are *good*. They have not allowed their circumstances to harden them. They are creative and hopeful. They are striving for good, and they see the goodness in the people around them. They see this world as something worth investing in. I wish we could all be like my students. Most days, I am sure my students have taught me more than I have taught them. And they don't even know it. The relationships I have created with my students are by far the best thing that will come out of my student teaching. I am a better person for knowing them. My least favorite part about student teaching is knowing that I am going to have to say goodbye.

When I reflect on student teaching, I only hope I left my students a little bit better off the same way they left me. My students have erased the doubt and uncertainty. Teaching is much more than worthwhile. While teacher pay remains an issue in our society, my students and the privilege to teach is worth much more than that income. Yes, I could have become a doctor or a lawyer. But why would I want to do that when teaching history is on the table? If student teaching is a taste of the next chapter of my life, I am overjoyed at the outlook.