

Dear Reader,

December 9, 2010

I don't believe that I am fully equipped to answer the question "Who am I as a teacher of secondary English". I have very limited experience in the classroom which to date is only three and a half months and not in the role of a classroom English teacher but rather an English Language Learner Tutor. During this time I have noticed a few things about some in-service teachers that I work with...

First, it seems that too quickly teachers forget about what they have learned in their Graduate studies. Too many opportunities for differentiation and extensions are missed because of heightened focus on how far behind they are (I have learned that teachers are *always* behind whether they are ahead or not), how to get students to simply pass the MCAS, or how much of a pain in the ass so and so teacher is. Second, too many people follow the "don't smile before Christmas" rule. Students feel threatened by those teachers that don't smile, these teachers being the ones that constantly complain about how the students in fact show up every day. Third, some teachers are too comfortable with teaching the same material they have been for the past ten years to realize that material is starting to get stale.

So what do these teachers have to do with me? Being bold, I would suggest that these are the types of teachers that I would never turn into. In an online post dated October 12, 2010 I started to flesh out my core beliefs as a teacher. In those beliefs I stated that students *need* to read novels like *Cather in the Rye* and *Slaughterhouse Five*. Students' experiences in life will help them to identify with certain characters. I do not believe that a student or anyone can read a book and not have a reaction to that book based on something that has happened to them. As a teacher I will draw on these experiences to relate the lessons to the students. Their culture will weigh heavily on how I will teach my class. Culture goes beyond simply where a student is from or how they may dress. Everything that makes that student a person comes from their culture. It is essential to the classroom to infuse their cultures otherwise they will shut down and assume that the teacher does not care therefore they will not care.

Included in my portfolio is my autobiography lesson entitled Writing with Reflection. This is included to help exemplify my belief that it is important to know who your students are and to be will to take chances with your lessons. When I designed the lesson the thought of having a student tell their life story and it being an emotional story did not enter my mind. Ideally the lesson would be taught after I have gotten to know the students, but in some schools non-fiction may come at the beginning of the year. I learned that when planning a lesson you need to be very careful and expect that a student may have a strong emotional reaction and be prepared to deal with the consequences of implementing that lesson. I feel that too often during our study at UMASS Lowell we can forget that our students have home lives and sometimes those lives can be harder than imagined.

I recognize that even though I am coming to the end of my graduate study, I still have quite a bit to learn. This is evident in my management plan that I submitted. The ideal situation is highlighted by writing in that I will be available after school for extra help. The reality of the situation is such that often time students will not come to extra help or that I may not have the time to fulfill the needs of the students. The management plan also reminds us as teachers that we are creating a small community and that the residents (students) of this community must have a say in how it will be run. Having students play an active role in setting up the rules of the classroom will give them more of an ownership in the room and they will make more of an effort in all facets.

As a hopeful teacher of secondary English I recognize the fact that I do not fully know yet who I am as a teacher, but I do know who I want to be. I want to share with students my love for literature and words. I want to share my life experiences with my students and want them to share theirs. I want students to become lifelong learners and not love literature as I do, but simply appreciate it. I want them realize that books have a place in our society. I am ready for the challenge of being an adult figure in their lives when there may not be one at home.

Sincerely,
Stephen Silva